
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

and the

REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY



Edited by

Farrah Deeba

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REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY - 2026**

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**SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF
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PREFACE

This book, *Social Institutions and the Reproduction of Gender Inequality*, brings together diverse scholarly perspectives on the persistent and evolving dynamics of gender inequality within contemporary societies. Despite significant global progress toward gender equality, deeply rooted social institutions continue to reproduce structural inequalities in various forms.

The chapters in this volume examine gendered patterns across different social, economic, and cultural contexts. From transformations in family structures and gender roles, to the socioeconomic implications of the “pink tax,” and from community-level inequalities to the psychological impacts of harmful cultural practices, each contribution highlights how gender inequality is sustained, challenged, and redefined.

By offering both theoretical insights and empirical analyses from different regions, this book aims to contribute to ongoing academic discussions and policy debates on gender justice and social transformation. It is our hope that this volume will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and readers interested in understanding and addressing the complexities of gender inequality in a global context.

Editorial Team
March 24, 2026
Türkiye

*SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF GENDER
INEQUALITY*

CHAPTER 1
**THE FAMILY AND THE CHANGE OF GENDER
ROLES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: FROM
PATRIARCHAL COMPLEMENTARITY TO
PRIVATE DEMOCRACY**

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INEQUALITY*

INTRODUCTION

Preamble: An Institution Between Dissolution and Democratisation

In the contemporary social imaginary, the family occupies a paradoxical place. Constantly invoked in public discourse as the 'fundamental cell of society', it is simultaneously accused of 'crisis' and 'decline' by conservative voices and celebrated as a space of emancipation and democratic negotiation by progressive voices. This ambivalence is not accidental; it reflects the profound tensions of an institution in the midst of a process of radical reconfiguration.

In the contemporary sociological landscape, the family is no longer viewed as a static, homogeneous and universal entity, but as a dynamic site of resistance and renegotiation. Far from being merely a 'cell of society' – an organicist metaphor suggesting harmony and pre-established functionality – it represents the microcosm in which macro-political, economic and cultural changes collide with individual identities, with aspirations for equality and with the inertia of habits.

This chapter aims to analyse the transformation of gender roles in the contemporary family from a critical, interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective. We will argue that the transition from the family model based on hierarchy and rigid complementarity to a model based on reflexive intimacy and democratic negotiation (Giddens, 1992) has transformed the family from an institution of control into an arena of private democracy. However, this democratisation is neither linear nor free of contradictions. It is marked by persistent gaps between declared egalitarian values and everyday domestic practices, between aspirations for partnership and the realities of structural inertia.

Chapter Objectives

The chapter pursues five main, interconnected objectives:

- The critical deconstruction of the traditional model of the sexual division of labour, highlighting its historical and economic roots and the way in which it has been naturalised through religious, scientific and cultural discourses.

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- The systematic analysis of the driving forces that have eroded this model – women's economic emancipation, the contraceptive revolution and the successive waves of feminist thought – and of the way in which these forces have reconfigured both the structure of the family and the subjectivity of individuals.
- The detailed cartography of contemporary manifestations of change and the resistances encountered: conjugal role mobility, the emergence of the 'new father', the asymmetric persistence of the 'second shift', but above all the invisible dimension of domestic work – cognitive management and the mental load.
- The critical investigation of strategies for outsourcing domestic work and of global care chains, highlighting how the emancipation of women from privileged classes is often built on the exploitation of other women, from disadvantaged classes or geographical areas.
- The examination of new technologies for managing domestic life (tracking applications, outsourcing platforms, planning algorithms) as potentially emancipatory tools, but also as new sources of bureaucratisation of intimacy and perpetuation of gender inequalities.

Theoretical Framework: From Patriarchy to Private Democracy

In order to overcome unidisciplinary approaches and to offer a nuanced analysis of the transformations of gender roles in the family, we adopt an integrative theoretical framework, constructed at the intersection of four major intellectual traditions.

The Theory of Reflexive Modernisation and Democratic Intimacy

The works of Anthony Giddens (1992) and of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2002) offer essential instruments for understanding the transformations of intimacy in contemporary societies. Giddens introduces the concept of the pure relationship, defined as a relationship that is no longer sustained by external criteria (social pressure, moral duty, economic dependence), but exclusively by the intrinsic gratification that the partners obtain from it.

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In this framework, private democracy becomes a normative ideal: intimate relations should be governed by the same principles as political democracy negotiation, consent, transparency and mutual respect. This transition from the 'family-destiny' to the 'family-project' has ambivalent consequences. On the one hand, it opens space for authenticity, democratic negotiation and personal development; on the other hand, it makes relationships fundamentally fragile, contingent and permanently exposed to reevaluation.

Feminist theory of domestic work and the sexual division of labour

A second theoretical pillar is constituted by the contributions of materialist and socialist feminism, which have deconstructed the ideology of 'feminine domesticity' and brought to light the invisible work of women in the household. Authors such as Christine Delphy (1984), Silvia Federici (1975; 2012) and, more recently, Arlie Hochschild (1989; 2003; 2012) have demonstrated that unpaid domestic work is not an expression of love or feminine vocation, but a social relation of production that underpins capitalist exploitation and patriarchal subordination. Hochschild's concept of the 'second shift' remains essential for our analysis, as do its subsequent extensions: 'mental load', 'cognitive management' and 'emotion work'. These concepts allow us to move beyond a simplistic vision of domestic work, reduced to hours of cleaning or cooking, and to capture the invisible, continuous and exhausting dimension of feminine responsibility for the smooth running of the household.

Intersectionality theory and global care chains

To understand how gender inequalities intersect with those of class, ethnicity and citizenship, we appeal to intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) and its developments within postcolonial and transnational studies. The concept of global care chains, developed by Arlie Hochschild (2000; 2003) and extended by authors such as Rhacel Parreñas (2001) and Bridget Anderson (2000), describes a transnational network of care transfer, in which women from the Global North outsource their domestic responsibilities to women from the Global South or from the peripheries of Europe, who, in turn, leave their own children in the care of other, poorer women.

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This intersectional perspective allows us to move beyond a strictly national or 'Western-centric' analysis of gender inequalities and to understand how the emancipation of some is built on the exploitation of others.

Theory of gender as performance and the deconstruction of masculinity

Finally, to analyse the transformations of paternity and the emergence of the 'new father', we draw on the contributions of queer theory and critical masculinity studies. Judith Butler (1990) deconstructed the idea of gender as essence or biological given, proposing instead the concept of performativity – gender is something we *do*, not something we *are*. In the same register, authors such as R.W. Connell (1987; 1995) and Michael Kimmel (2000) have shown that masculinity is not a monolithic category, but a configuration of practices that transforms historically and is traversed by relations of power and inequality.

Methodology and structure

The chapter adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary and comparative methodology, based on:

- Critical analysis of specialist literature from the fields of family sociology, gender studies, feminist political economy and social psychology;
- Synthesis of empirical research on the domestic division of labour, cognitive management, involved paternity and the outsourcing of care services;
- Analysis of public and scientific discourse around new technologies for managing domestic life;
- Illustrative case studies of different strategies for negotiating gender inequalities in the family.

The structure follows a logical trajectory from the archeology of the traditional model of the sexual division of labour, to the diagnosis of the driving forces of change, then to the detailed cartography of contemporary manifestations (with a focus on cognitive management, the new father, digitalisation and global care chains).

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Finally to the analysis of new family models and the formulation of conclusions about the possibility of a post-patriarchal family.

1. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM ABSOLUTE PATRIARCHY TO THE MODERN CONJUGAL FAMILY

To understand the amplitude and depth of contemporary transformations of gender roles in the family, an archeology of the traditional model is indispensable. This is not an exercise in nostalgia or anachronistic condemnation, but a critical deconstruction of the way in which the sexual division of labour has been naturalised, presented as inevitable and eternal, when in fact it is a specific historical product, linked to a particular mode of organising production and reproduction.

The Pre-Industrial Family: The Unit of Production and Absolute Patriarchy

In pre-industrial societies (agrarian, artisanal), the family functioned as an integrated unit of production. The workplace and the dwelling coincided; all members of the household – man, woman, children, relatives, servants contributed to the agricultural or artisanal work necessary for survival. In this context, authority was patriarchal and indivisible. The father (or the eldest man) held economic, juridical and symbolic power over all other members of the household. The woman was juridically subordinate – in the English common law system, the status of *feme covert* meant that, through marriage, the juridical personality of the woman was 'covered' by that of the husband; she could not own property, could not sign contracts, could not file lawsuits in her own name. The division of labour in this period was dictated by biological necessity (the superior physical strength of the man was essential for certain agricultural tasks) and by the structure of property (the transmission of patrimony along the masculine line). However, this division was nowhere near as rigid as that which was to follow in the industrial era. Pre-industrial women were not exclusively 'housewives'; they actively participated in production, and their work was visible, valorised and essential for the survival of the household.

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The Industrial Revolution: The separation of spheres and the creation of the 'cult of domesticity'

The Industrial Revolution produced a fundamental schism in the organisation of social life. By moving production from the household to the factory, it separated the workplace from the dwelling and created two distinct spheres, radically gendered:

- The public sphere (the labour market, politics, urban life) – associated with masculinity, reason, competition and productivity;
- The private sphere (the home, the family, care) – associated with femininity, emotion, cooperation and reproduction.

This separation was accompanied by the emergence of a new cultural ideal: the 'cult of domesticity'. The bourgeois woman (for this ideology was, initially, one of class) was defined exclusively by her roles as wife and mother. She was the 'angel of the house', whose sacred mission was to create a refuge of peace and morality for the husband weary from the competitive struggle of the public sphere. In parallel, the figure of the 'male breadwinner' was consolidated. The man was defined exclusively by his capacity to provide economic resources for the family; his social status, his dignity and his masculine identity depended on success in this mission. Failure to be the 'breadwinner' was experienced as a profound crisis of masculine identity. This rigid specialisation of roles – man in the productive sphere, woman in the reproductive sphere – constituted the foundation of the traditional nuclear family which, although presented as eternal and natural, is in fact a specific product of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism.

The crisis of the traditional model in the twentieth century

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and accelerating dramatically after the Second World War, the traditional model entered a process of systemic erosion due to several convergent factors:

- The massive participation of women in the labour market, initially as an effect of the world wars (which drew women out of the household to replace mobilised men), then as an effect of the expansion of the service sector and the rise in female educational attainment.

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- The contraceptive revolution, which dissociated sexuality from procreation and offered women, for the first time in history, control over their own bodies and the capacity to plan their reproductive lives independently of biological constraints.
- The successive waves of feminist movements, which contested the ideological foundation of the sexual division of labour and demanded juridical, economic and social equality between men and women.
- The economic crisis of the 1970s, which made the 'male breadwinner' model inaccessible for more and more families, forcing women into the labour market not only from aspirations for emancipation, but from pure economic necessity.

These forces have radically transformed the familial landscape. Marriage ceased to be an economic necessity for women (a form of patriarchal 'social insurance') and became, at least as an ideal, an affective option. Women acquired what American sociologist Frances Goldscheider (2000) calls 'exit power' – the capacity to survive economically outside of marriage, which fundamentally transforms the dynamics of conjugal negotiation.

2. THE DRIVING FORCES OF CHANGE: ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION, CONTRACEPTIVE REVOLUTION AND FEMINIST DISCOURSES

2.1 Women's Economic Emancipation and 'Exit Power'

The massive access of women to the paid labour market represents, without doubt, the principal driving force of the transformation of gender roles in the contemporary family. Statistical data are eloquent: in 1950, women represented approximately 30% of the labour force in Western countries; in 2020, the percentage approaches 50% in most OECD countries, with significant variations according to social policies and cultural context.

The consequences of this transformation are multiple and profound:

- Financial autonomy and negotiating power: Women who have their own income are no longer economically dependent on their husbands. This independence confers upon them substantially greater negotiating power within the conjugal relationship. Decisions regarding expenditure,

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investments, geographical moves or children's education become objects of negotiation, not of unilateral imposition.

- Exit power: Perhaps the most important consequence of economic independence is what sociologists call 'exit power'. Women who can survive economically outside of marriage are no longer captive to an abusive or unsatisfactory relationship. This power fundamentally transforms the nature of the marital contract: from a lifelong engagement, imposed and socially sanctioned, it becomes a contingent relationship, maintained only as long as it brings satisfaction to both partners.
- Change in expectations and aspirations: Participation in the labour market exposes women to new models of success and fulfilment, beyond the traditional role of wife and mother. Career becomes a source of identity, self-esteem and social recognition, competing with – and often replacing – the domestic role as the principal source of feminine value.
- Impact on children's socialisation: Girls who grow up in families where the mother works outside the home have different expectations regarding their own future. They too desire a career and a partner who shares domestic responsibilities. Boys who grow up in such families are also more predisposed to accept and practise involved paternity.

2.2 The Contraceptive Revolution and Reproductive Autonomy

If economic emancipation offers women the power to leave the relationship, the contraceptive revolution offers them the power to decide over their own bodies and over their own reproductive lives. The dissociation of sexuality from procreation made possible by access to effective and safe contraceptives (the pill, the IUD) and to legal and safe abortion – has fundamental consequences:

Life planning: Women can decide when and if to have children, how many and at what interval. This capacity for planning allows them to synchronise their reproductive life with their professional and educational life, to postpone maternity until the completion of studies or until reaching a threshold of career stability.

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Separation of sexuality from reproduction: For the first time in history, feminine sexuality is liberated from the permanent 'threat' of an unwanted pregnancy. This opens the way for a recreational sexuality, based on mutual desire and pleasure, not on conjugal duty or the reproductive imperative.

Redefinition of maternity: Maternity ceases to be an inevitable biological destiny and becomes a choice. This change in status has profound psychological implications: women who desire and choose to become mothers are, statistically, more satisfied with this role than those for whom maternity was an accident or a social imposition.

Contestation of patriarchal control: Control over reproduction was, for millennia, one of the central mechanisms of patriarchal power. The man had to be certain of his paternity, and this certainty was ensured through the strict control of feminine sexuality (premarital virginity, marital fidelity). The contraceptive revolution, by separating sexuality from reproduction, undermines this mechanism of control and opens the way for an autonomous feminine sexuality.

2.3 Feminist Discourses: The Deconstruction of Gender as Destiny

No large-scale social transformation occurs exclusively through material changes; it also requires a change in consciousness, in the way individuals understand and interpret their own experience. This is the essential role played by feminist discourses in the transformation of gender roles.

Second-wave feminism (1960s-1980s) deconstructed the myth of 'feminine fulfilment' exclusively through maternity and domesticity. Authors such as Betty Friedan (1963), in *The Feminine Mystique*, gave voice to the diffuse dissatisfaction of millions of educated, housebound women who felt incomplete and unsatisfied despite material comfort. Friedan called this state 'the problem that has no name' and identified its source not in personal failure, but in the social structures that limited feminine aspirations to the domestic sphere. Third-wave feminism (1990s-present) took this deconstruction even further. Inspired by the works of Judith Butler (1990) and other post-structuralist theorists, feminists of this wave contested the very idea that gender is a natural category or an essence.

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In its place, they proposed the concept of gender as performance – what we call 'feminine' or 'masculine' is not the expression of a pre-established interior identity, but the effect of repetitive acts that produce the illusion of an essence.

This theoretical deconstruction has profound practical consequences. If gender is a performance, then it can be reperformed differently. Men can learn to perform care and vulnerability; women can learn to perform authority and technical competence. There are no 'natural barriers' preventing this reconfiguration; there are only social and cultural barriers that can be contested and dismantled.

3. CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTATIONS OF CHANGE AND THE RESISTANCES ENCOUNTERED

The structural and cultural transformations described above have not yet translated into full equality within the family. What we observe in contemporary societies is a persistent gap between the spectacular progress recorded in the public sphere (education, labour market, politics) and the remarkable inertia of the domestic sphere.

3.1 Conjugal Role Mobility: From Complementarity to Interchangeability

A broad consensus shared in family sociology is that we are witnessing a transition from complementary roles to interchangeable roles. In the traditional model, the roles of spouses were different and unequal, but interdependent: he brought material resources, she ensured emotional well-being and care. In the emerging model, roles tend to become similar and potentially interchangeable: both partners contribute to the family budget and both are responsible for childcare and housework.

However, the transition is profoundly asymmetric. Women have entered the public sphere (employment, education, career) rapidly and massively. Men, however, are penetrating the domestic sphere much more slowly. Graphically, we can say that women have travelled half the distance between the private sphere and the public one, while men have barely begun to travel the reverse path.

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This asymmetry generates what Hochschild (1989) calls 'the stalled revolution': women have revolutionised the way they conceive their lives and careers, but men have not revolutionised to the same extent the way they conceive their contribution to domestic life.

3.2 Beyond Working Hours: 'The Second Shift' and the Invisible Architecture of Cognitive Management

Within gender studies, the analysis of domestic work has evolved significantly in recent decades. From the simple timing of physical tasks (how many hours of cleaning, how many hours of cooking), research has moved towards investigating the psychological complexity of managing a household.

'The Second Shift': A Persistent Legacy

The concept introduced by Arlie Hochschild in her eponymous book (1989) remains disturbingly current, more than three decades after its publication. By 'the second shift', Hochschild designates the domestic and care work that women perform after returning home from their paid workplace (the first shift).

Empirical research conducted over the last three decades confirms the persistence of this gap: Asymmetry of tasks: Men tend to take on 'discretionary' tasks or those with flexible schedules – repairs, car maintenance, mowing the lawn, playing with children. Women remain responsible for 'rigid' and daily tasks – cooking, cleaning, laundry, caring for sick children – tasks that cannot be postponed and that cannot be rescheduled without negative consequences.

- The time gap: Even in couples where both partners work full-time, women accumulate, on average, several additional weeks of domestic work per year compared to their partners. This gap, although smaller than in the 1960s, persists with remarkable tenacity.
- Inequality in leisure time: The direct consequence of this gap is inequality in access to leisure time. Women have, on average, several hours less free time per week than men, and their free time is more fragmented and more permeable to interruptions.

Cognitive management and the 'mental load'

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If the 'second shift' refers mainly to the physical execution of domestic tasks, cognitive management refers to the role of 'project manager' of the family. This is the invisible, continuous and exhausting work of anticipating needs, planning, organising and monitoring.

The concept of 'mental load' – popularised by French essayist Emma (2017) and American author Eve Rodsky (2019) – designates precisely this invisible dimension of domestic work.

Anticipation and planning: It is not just about taking the child to the doctor, but about:

- Knowing when the appointment needs to be made (when the prescription expires, when the annual check-up approaches);
- Knowing which vaccines are due and at what age;
- Checking the stock of medicines in the house;
- Coordinating the school calendar with the work schedules of both parents.

Monitoring and delegation: Even when partners 'help' or take on certain tasks, the woman often remains the one who delegates the task and monitors its correct execution. This dynamic underlines an essential fact: ultimate responsibility for the smooth running of the household continues to rest with the woman. The man appears, in this configuration, not as an equal co-manager, but as an assistant – useful, well-intentioned, but nevertheless subordinate. He 'helps', but he does not hold the care for the smooth running of the house in his mind. Decision fatigue: Cognitive management involves an immense number of daily decisions, from major ones (choosing the school, planning holidays) to apparently minor ones (what the family eats this evening, when the bed linen needs changing, what gift to buy for Saturday's party). This decisional overload leads to a state of permanent mental vigilance, a fatigue that does not come from physical effort, but from the immense volume of logistical details that must be processed simultaneously – what psychologists call domestic multitasking. Consequences for mental health: Numerous studies have correlated mental load with increased levels of anxiety, depression and professional burnout among women. Chronic cognitive overload reduces concentration capacity, affects sleep quality and erodes marital satisfaction.

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+Emotion work

A natural extension of cognitive management is emotion work in the family. The concept, initially developed by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) to describe the emotional demands of paid work (especially in service professions), was subsequently applied also to the domestic sphere.

Emotion work in the family involves:

- Maintaining harmony: Calming spirits, avoiding conflicts, creating a pleasant atmosphere;
- Mediating conflicts: Especially between children, but also between partners and extended family;
- Managing relations with extended family: Remembering birthdays, organising visits, mediating tensions between husband and his parents;
- Providing moral support to the partner: Listening to professional problems, encouraging, emotional validation.

In traditional gender structures, the woman is considered the 'affection specialist' of the family. This labelling has a perverse effect: emotion work is naturalised – it is no longer perceived as work, but as an expression of 'feminine nature', of 'love' or of 'self-giving'. Naturalisation leads to devaluation: what is 'natural' does not deserve recognition, compensation or equitable distribution.

Consequences for career and well-being

This double or triple burden (paid work + physical domestic work + cognitive management + emotion work) has direct and measurable effects on women's professional trajectories:

Domestic glass ceiling: Women often refuse promotions, overtime or large-scale projects not because they are not competent, but because their mental 'bandwidth' is already saturated by domestic responsibilities. The glass ceiling in careers is, for many women, preceded by a domestic glass ceiling – an invisible, but insurmountable, limit imposed by the volume of reproductive work. Motherhood penalty vs. Fatherhood premium: Research in the sociology of work has documented a fascinating and profoundly inequitable phenomenon.

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While men are often perceived as being more stable, more responsible and more dedicated after becoming fathers (the phenomenon called *fatherhood premium*), women are perceived as being less committed, more distracted and less reliable after becoming mothers (the phenomenon called *motherhood penalty*). This differentiated perception does not reflect reality (studies show that women with children are not less productive than those without children), but deeply ingrained gender prejudices, which fuel wage and career inequalities. Towards a shared 'ethic of care': Reconfiguring this systemic imbalance requires a paradigm shift – the transition from the model of 'help' offered by the partner to the model of shared responsibility. The solution does not lie only in equalising the number of hours of vacuuming or dishes washed, but in redistributing the management function: who holds the care for the smooth running of the house in their mind? Who carries the mental load of anticipation and planning? Who is, ultimately, responsible?

3.3 Intersectional perspectives: Outsourcing of work and 'Global Care Chains'

Until now, our analysis has focused almost exclusively on the internal dynamics of the heterosexual couple, from middle and upper classes, in developed countries. A truly critical and comprehensive perspective must, however, provincialise this experience and place it in the broader context of global inequalities.

Outsourcing Domestic Work: A Pact between Classes

Outsourcing domestic work (cleaning, cooking, childcare or elderly care) to paid nannies, housekeepers or carers represents an increasingly widespread strategy through which middle and upper-class families resolve the time conflict between career and private life. For women with higher education and demanding careers, equality in the couple is often 'bought' on the market. Instead of the partner (the man) taking on an equal share of domestic tasks, the family hires another woman – poorer, often a migrant, with limited access to social and labour rights. This strategy creates a pact between classes between partners: the husband and wife, although unequal in the sharing of domestic tasks, become equal in their position as employers.

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Class and status solidarity replaces or masks gender solidarity. Domestic inequality is not resolved; it is outsourced and displaced onto even more vulnerable women.

Global Care Chains

The concept of global care chains, developed by Arlie Hochschild (2000) and extended by Rhacel Parreñas (2001) and Bridget Anderson (2000), describes a transnational network of care transfer, linking households in rich countries with the villages and poor neighbourhoods of the world.

The typical structure of such a chain is as follows:

- A woman in the West (doctor, lawyer, manager) hires a migrant (from the Philippines, Ukraine, Romania, Moldova) to care for her children and household.
- The migrant leaves her own children in the country of origin, in the care of another woman – usually a grandmother, an aunt or an older sister.
- This woman, in turn, takes on the responsibility of care, often without any financial compensation, exhausting her physical and emotional resources.

The chain transfers the burden of the second shift from the privileged woman in the North to the precarious woman in the South, and from her to even poorer and more vulnerable women in her community. Each link in the chain is weaker than the previous one, and at the end of the chain, care disappears – the migrant's children are deprived of their mother's presence.

Maternalism and Exploitation

The relationship between the employer and the domestic worker is often marked by maternalism – a form of control that masks exploitation under the pretext that the worker is 'like a member of the family'.

Maternalism:

- Personalises the employment relationship, making it difficult to negotiate salary, schedule or working conditions;
- Devalues the work performed, presenting it as an act of affection, not as an economic activity;
- Hides the power imbalance between employer and employee;

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- Excludes the domestic worker from fundamental labour rights (paid leave, health insurance, pension).

Impact on the 'Mental Load'

A crucial observation for our analysis is that outsourcing does not eliminate cognitive management. Although outsourcing eliminates physical work (the execution of tasks), it does not eliminate – and sometimes even amplifies – the mental load.

The woman remains the project manager:

- She is the one who selects and interviews candidates for the position of nanny or housekeeper;
- She instructs the new employee regarding the standards of the house, culinary preferences, the children's routine;
- She monitors the quality of the work performed and intervenes when it does not meet expectations;
- She manages the relationship with the employee – negotiates days off, resolves conflicts, copes with feelings of guilt or ambivalence.

Partial outsourcing – the most frequent case – in which the employee comes for a few hours a day or a few times a week, preserves ultimate responsibility in the woman's hands. The mental load does not disappear; it merely transforms.

3.4 The 'New Father' and the Deconstruction of Cognitive Barriers

If past decades focused on the physical presence of the father (the father who 'helps' or who is 'present'), the new ideal of paternity – called in the specialist literature 'New Fatherhood' – aims at men's penetration into the nucleus of psychological responsibility.

From help to co-responsibility

The 'new father' no longer waits for instructions from his partner. He does not 'help' with raising children; he assumes an equal share of parental responsibilities. This paradigm shift consists in the voluntary assumption of cognitive management:

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- Early involvement: Longitudinal studies show that fathers who benefit from extended paternity leave (not just a few days, but a few months) develop the same abilities to 'read' the child's needs as mothers. They learn to identify types of crying, to anticipate hunger or tiredness, to respond appropriately to non-verbal signals. This discovery breaks the myth of 'maternal instinct' as the sole determinant of competent care.
- Affective paternity: Contemporary masculinity is beginning to integrate vulnerability and care as positive traits, not as weaknesses. The affective father, who hugs his child, who cries at strong emotions, who expresses his love verbally, is no longer perceived as an exception or a deviation from the masculine norm.

The Resilience of Maternal Gatekeeping

A subtle and frequently overlooked challenge to the 'new father' is the phenomenon of maternal gatekeeping. This concept describes the tendency, often unconscious, of some mothers to limit the father's access to certain domains of domestic and parental life.

The sources of maternal gatekeeping are multiple:

- Exclusive social validation from the maternal role: For many women, the status of 'perfect mother' is the principal – and sometimes only – source of social recognition and self-esteem. To cede control over childcare to the father means also to cede some of this source of validation.
- Differentiated standards: Some mothers develop such high standards for childcare and housework that no partner can meet them. Instead of negotiating and relaxing these standards, they prefer to take on the responsibility themselves, considering that 'it's simpler this way'.
- Criticism of alternative methods: Fathers who take on domestic or parental tasks often do them differently than mothers. They do not change the nappy in exactly the same way, do not cook exactly the same recipes, do not organise play according to exactly the same rules. Instead of being celebrated as expressions of autonomy and creativity, these differences are often criticised as 'mistakes' or 'incompetence'.

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The reconfiguration of roles therefore requires a bilateral process: men must assume responsibility and develop the necessary competencies; women must cede control, relax standards and accept diversity of styles.

Institutional and Cultural Barriers

The 'new father' confronts not only domestic barriers, but also powerful institutional and cultural barriers:

- The gender barrier at the workplace: Men who request paternity leave, reduced hours or flexible arrangements to care for their children are often socially and professionally penalised. They are perceived as being less ambitious, less dedicated to their careers, less 'masculine'. This penalisation – symmetrical, but not identical to the 'motherhood penalty' – discourages many men from assuming an active parental role.
- Absence of models: Men who wish to be 'new fathers' most often do not have models in their own fathers or in previous generations. They navigate uncharted territory, improvising and learning from mistakes.
- Lack of media representation: Although the situation is improving, mass media continue to represent paternity in traditional terms – the awkward father, the bumbling father, the absent father. Positive representations of involved paternity are still rare and often marginal.

3.5. Digitalisation of the domestic sphere: Tracking applications and the 'algorithmisation' of negotiation

In an attempt to make visible the invisible work and to objectify domestic negotiation, many contemporary couples turn to technology. Applications such as Fair Play (based on Eve Rodsky's method), Sweepy, Tody, OurHome or Cozi transform household management into a digital interface.

Making the invisible visible: The emancipatory potential of technology

Digitalisation has the potential to transform the mental load from a subjective, invisible and ineffable experience into concrete, objective, shareable data:

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- Externalisation of memory: Shared digital lists, common calendars, automatic notifications remove planning from the woman's mind and place it in a neutral space (the Cloud). Thus, the expression 'I didn't know we needed milk' ceases to be a valid excuse – all family members have access to the same information, at the same time.
- Gamification of tasks: Some applications assign points to domestic tasks, attempting to quantify the value of cleaning, cooking or logistical management. This gamification can stimulate children's involvement and make visible the contribution of each family member.
- Transparency and accountability: Applications create a history of completed tasks, allowing a more objective evaluation of each partner's contribution and reducing subjective disputes of the type 'I do more than you'.

The traps of digitalisation: Surveillance or liberation?

Although technology promises equity and efficiency, it also introduces new risks and new forms of inequality:

- Bureaucratisation of intimacy: There is a danger that the couple relationship becomes a transaction based on performance indicators (KPIs – Key Performance Indicators), on points and on graphs. Intimacy, spontaneity and affective solidarity risk being eroded by this bureaucratisation of domestic life.
- New cognitive management: A crucial – and often ignored – observation is that, most often, it is still the woman who configures the application, enters the initial data, adds new tasks and monitors whether the partner has 'checked off' his tasks on time. In this case, cognitive management has not disappeared; it has merely digitalised and, in certain respects, even amplified.
- Differentiated access to technology: Not all families have equal access to technology, and within families that do have access, digital competencies are unequally distributed. This inequality can reproduce and even deepen existing gender inequalities.

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Limits of Technological Solutions

Digitalisation of the domestic sphere, although useful and potentially emancipatory, cannot replace structural and cultural changes. Applications can make visible invisible work, but they cannot redistribute this work. They can facilitate negotiation, but they cannot impose equality. They can document inequality, but they cannot eliminate it.

The solution lies not in technology, but in the transformation of power relations that structure domestic life.

4. NEW FAMILY MODELS AND GENDER CHALLENGES

The transformations described above have generated an unprecedented diversification of forms of family life. This diversification is not only a quantitative change (more types of families), but also a qualitative change: different family configurations offer unequal opportunities for the renegotiation of gender roles.

Single-Parent Families: Economic Vulnerability and Decisional Autonomy

Single-parent families – in the vast majority of cases, headed by women – represent one of the most significant transformations of the contemporary family landscape. They are the result of three convergent phenomena: the increase in the divorce rate, the increase in the number of births outside marriage and the increase in life expectancy (which leaves many widows to raise their children alone). Economic vulnerability remains the main characteristic of this type of family. In the absence of a second income and, often, in the absence of child support payments made regularly, single-parent families are much more exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion. This economic vulnerability is a direct consequence of gender inequalities in the labour market (lower wages, interrupted careers, reduced access to leadership positions).

Paradoxically, however, this same family configuration offers women total decisional autonomy. In the absence of a partner, domestic negotiation ceases – or, more precisely, becomes a negotiation exclusively with oneself.

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The woman decides alone how to spend the money, how to educate the children, how to organise her time. This autonomy, although bought at the price of an unshared domestic burden, is often experienced as a liberation from the conflicts and compromises of couple life.

Reconstituted families: Negotiating roles without social script

Reconstituted families – formed through the remarriage of one or both partners, bringing children from previous relationships represent a fascinating social laboratory for the study of the transformation of gender roles. Unlike the traditional nuclear family, which benefits from a clear social script (what it means to be 'mother', 'father', 'wife', 'husband'), the reconstituted family creates new roles – stepmother, stepfather, stepbrother, stepsister – which do not benefit from a pre-established script.

This absence of a model can, paradoxically, be an opportunity. In the absence of rigid expectations, partners are forced to negotiate – to decide together what it means to be a 'good stepfather', what authority the partner has over non-biological children, how financial and domestic responsibilities are shared. This negotiation, although difficult and often conflictual, can lead to more egalitarian configurations than those in traditional families, where inequalities are naturalised and reproduced through inertia.

Consensual Unions: The Freedom to Leave and the Equality of Staying

The increase in the number of couples who choose to cohabit without marrying – a phenomenon called consensual union or cohabitation – reflects a profound change in the nature of marital commitment. In the absence of legal constraints and the ritualistic pressures of tradition, the relationship becomes what Giddens (1992) calls a 'pure relationship' – maintained exclusively through the satisfaction that the partners obtain from it. This fundamental contingency has paradoxical consequences:

On the one hand, the freedom to leave is greater, which can generate insecurity and anxiety. On the other hand, this same freedom strengthens the negotiating position of the weaker partner (usually the woman).

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Knowing that the relationship can be ended at any moment, the dominant partner is forced to negotiate and to make concessions. Empirical research partially confirms this hypothesis: consensual unions tend to be, on average, more egalitarian than official marriages. However, they are also more unstable – which raises the question of whether equality can be maintained in the long term in the absence of strong institutional commitments.

Conclusions and Future Directions: The Post-Patriarchal Family between Aspiration and Reality

An interregnum: Old models discredited, new models not yet institutionalised. We find ourselves, regarding the family and gender roles, in an interregnum phase – a historical interval in which the old patriarchal models are discredited, but the new egalitarian models are not yet fully institutionalised.

The characteristics of this interregnum are:

- The tension between aspiration and practice: The majority of men and women declare that they support gender equality in the family, but their everyday practices remain marked by the inertia of tradition.
- Chronic conflict: In the absence of clear models and stable norms, each couple is forced to negotiate from scratch the division of labour, parental responsibilities, financial management. This perpetual process of negotiation is exhausting and often conflictual.
- Retraditionalisation as a reaction: The anxiety generated by this uncertainty fuels retraditionalisation movements that propose a return to 'traditional family values' as a solution to the contemporary crisis.

Central thesis: From family solidarity based on sacrifice to solidarity based on autonomy. The central thesis of this chapter can be formulated as follows:

The future of the family depends on society's capacity to collectivise the responsibility of care, so that 'family solidarity' is no longer built on the systematic sacrifice of feminine autonomy.

This thesis has implications at multiple levels: At the micro level (the couple and the family): The transition from the model of 'help' to the model of shared responsibility.

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This presupposes not only a redistribution of physical tasks, but also – and above all a redistribution of cognitive management and ultimate responsibility. At the meso level (public policies): The transition from the familialist model (which considers care an exclusive responsibility of the family) to the social-democratic model (which considers care a collective responsibility). This presupposes massive investments in care infrastructure (nurseries, kindergartens, after-school programmes, services for the elderly), equal and non-transferable parental leave for both parents, and fiscal policies that encourage, not penalise, equality.

At the macro level (global): The transition from the model of global care chains – which outsource exploitation to the peripheries – to the model of globalisation of rights. This presupposes the recognition of domestic work as work, the granting of full rights to migrant workers, and investments in the development of countries of origin, so that forced migration for care is no longer the only option.

Future research directions: Future research should focus on several priority directions

- Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of the domestic division of labour in couples across the life cycle, to identify critical moments of (re)negotiation and the factors that facilitate or hinder equality.
- Qualitative, ethnographic research exploring the subjective experience of the mental load and the creative strategies through which women and men manage this burden.
- International comparative studies evaluating the impact of different public policies (parental leave, care services, fiscal policies) on the domestic division of labour and on gender equality in the family.
- Intersectional research analysing how class, ethnicity, migration status and other dimensions of social inequality interact with gender in configuring domestic responsibilities.
- Critical studies of technology evaluating, beyond the promotional discourse, the real impact of domestic management applications on the distribution of the mental load and on the quality of couple relationships.

Coda: A realistic utopia: A post-patriarchal family is not a distant utopia; it is an immanent possibility in present structures and practices.

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We find it, fragmentarily and imperfectly, in couples who have managed to negotiate an equitable division of domestic work, in fathers who assume long paternity leaves, in mothers who refuse to carry the mental load of the household alone any longer.

The future of the family will be decided neither by nostalgic appeals to the past, nor by the technological promises of the present. It will be decided by millions of daily negotiations, by small victories and great failures, by the patience and perseverance of those who refuse to accept that gender inequality in the family is 'natural' or 'inevitable'.

A truly democratic family – in which the responsibility of care is shared, in which the autonomy of each member is respected, in which solidarity is not built on sacrifice but on freedom – is possible. And it is worth fighting for.

The normative horizon: Equality as process, not as state. A crucial theoretical clarification is necessary at this point: gender equality in the family should not be understood as a final state to be achieved, but as a continuous process of negotiation and renegotiation. Unlike traditional societies, where gender roles were fixed, naturalised and non-negotiable, modern societies are characterised by the fundamental contingency of all social arrangements, including those governing intimacy and domestic life.

This contingency is not a failure of the project of equality; it is its very condition of possibility. A truly egalitarian family is not one that has achieved a perfect, definitive and immutable balance of responsibilities – such a family would merely have replaced one form of rigidity with another. A truly egalitarian family is one that possesses the institutional and emotional resources to continuously renegotiate the distribution of tasks and responsibilities in response to changing circumstances, aspirations and needs.

This perspective has important implications for both research and intervention:

- For research: Instead of measuring the 'degree of equality' achieved by a couple at a given moment, it is more fruitful to analyse the processes of negotiation themselves – the resources each partner brings to the negotiation, the strategies they employ, the obstacles they encounter, the moments of breakthrough and setback.

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- For intervention: Therapeutic and educational programmes should not aim to impose a particular model of egalitarian family, but to equip couples with the competencies necessary for effective, fair and respectful negotiation. These competencies include communication skills, emotional regulation, perspective-taking and, crucially, the capacity to recognise and challenge one's own privileges and blind spots.

The paradox of freedom: Choice, constraint and the illusion of individual solutions. A persistent theme throughout this chapter has been the paradox of freedom that characterises late modern family life. On the one hand, individuals have unprecedented freedom to choose their life paths to marry or not, to have children or not, to pursue a career or to prioritise family, to share domestic responsibilities or to outsource them. On the other hand, these choices are made under conditions of severe structural constraint labour markets that penalise care, public policies that assume rather than challenge traditional gender roles, cultural norms that continue to associate femininity with sacrifice and masculinity with providerhood. The ideology of individual choice so central to neoliberal capitalism obscures these structural constraints and places an impossible burden on individuals and couples. Women who 'choose' to reduce their working hours after becoming mothers are not exercising free choice; they are responding rationally to a context in which childcare is expensive, paternity leave is short, workplace flexibility is limited, and social norms continue to expect mothers to be the primary parent. Men who 'choose' not to take extended paternity leave are not exercising free choice; they are responding rationally to a context in which such leave is poorly remunerated, career penalties are real, and masculine identity continues to be tied to professional success. The illusion of individual solutions is perhaps most evident in the realm of digital applications for domestic management. These applications promise to solve the problem of the mental load through better organisation, clearer communication and more efficient task allocation. What they cannot solve – and what they in fact obscure is the structural inequality that generates this mental load in the first place. An application cannot redistribute power; it cannot challenge the association of femininity with domestic competence; it cannot make care work visible and valued in a society that systematically devalues it.

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The political dimension: From personal trouble to public issue: C. Wright Mills, in his classic work *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), distinguished between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues'. A personal trouble is a problem that affects an individual and their immediate circle; it is understood in terms of individual character, choices and circumstances. A public issue is a problem that affects many individuals and is rooted in the structure of social institutions.

For decades, the unequal distribution of domestic work and the mental load have been treated primarily as personal troubles – as problems to be solved through better communication, more equitable individual arrangements, more involved husbands, more assertive wives. This chapter has argued that they must be understood, first and foremost, as public issues – as consequences of social structures that systematically disadvantage women and advantage men, that devalue care work, that penalise parenthood for women while rewarding it for men.

The personal is political – this foundational slogan of second-wave feminism remains as relevant today as it was fifty years ago. The unequal division of domestic labour is not a private matter between husbands and wives; it is a manifestation of structural gender inequality that pervades every institution of contemporary society – the labour market, the education system, the legal system, the media, religion, the state.

Consequences for policy: If the unequal division of domestic work is a public issue, then it requires public solutions. These include:

- Parental leave policies that are generous, equally divided between parents, and non-transferable (use-it-or-lose-it). Such policies not only enable fathers to be more involved in care; they also destabilise the assumption that care is primarily a feminine responsibility.
- Early childhood education and care policies that provide universal, affordable, high-quality childcare from an early age. Such policies reduce the care burden on families and, within families, on women.
- Labour market policies that penalise gender discrimination, promote equal pay, and support flexible working arrangements for both men and women.

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- Educational policies that challenge gender stereotypes from an early age, teach boys and girls the skills of care and domestic work, and prepare all young people for lives of shared responsibility.
- Media policies that promote diverse representations of masculinity and femininity, challenge the association of care with femininity and success with masculinity, and give visibility to alternative family arrangements.

The global dimension: Solidarity beyond borders. No analysis of gender inequality in the family can be complete without considering its global dimension. The emancipation of women in the Global North has been, in significant part, purchased through the exploitation of women from the Global South and from the peripheries of Europe. The domestic workers, nannies and carers who make it possible for professional women in London, Paris or Berlin to pursue demanding careers while maintaining a semblance of work-life balance are themselves mothers who have left their own children in the care of other, even poorer women in their countries of origin.

This global care chain is a structure of systematic inequality that cuts across gender solidarity. The privileged woman and the migrant woman are both women, both mothers, both engaged in the work of care. Yet one is able to pursue professional fulfilment and personal autonomy precisely because the other is denied these same possibilities.

Towards a global feminism of care: A truly emancipatory feminist politics must address this global dimension. It must:

- Make visible the global care chains that sustain the lifestyles of the privileged and demand that the costs of care be fairly distributed, not endlessly displaced onto the most vulnerable.
- Demand rights for migrant domestic workers – the right to decent wages, reasonable working hours, health insurance, pension contributions, family reunification, permanent residency.
- Support development in countries of origin, so that migration for care work becomes a genuine choice rather than an economic necessity.
- Challenge the ideology of maternalism that masks exploitation and denies domestic workers the recognition they deserve as workers, not as 'members of the family'.

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The temporal dimension: Slow change and the weight of history. Change in gender relations, particularly in the intimate sphere of the family, is exceptionally slow. This slowness is not accidental; it reflects the depth of the transformation required. We are not merely asking individuals to change their behaviour; we are asking them to change their identities, their sense of self, their deepest emotional attachments.

For women, letting go of the mental load means letting go of an identity built around competence in the domestic sphere an identity that has been, for centuries, one of the few sources of feminine value and recognition. It means trusting that the partner will care for the children adequately, even if his methods differ; it means accepting that the house will not always be as clean or the meals as elaborate; it means relinquishing the sense of indispensability that, however burdensome, is also a source of power and self-esteem.

For men, taking on the mental load means embracing an identity that has been historically devalued the caregiving, nurturing, emotionally expressive male. It means learning skills that were systematically denied to them in childhood and adolescence; it means accepting career penalties and social sanctions; it means redefining masculinity in terms that are not yet fully legitimate in many social contexts.

This is slow, difficult, often painful work. It is work that proceeds through small, incremental changes across generations fathers who are slightly more involved than their own fathers, mothers who are slightly more willing to let go than their own mothers, sons who grow up assuming that they will share domestic responsibilities, daughters who grow up expecting to have both a career and an involved partner.

The family is, in this sense, the most important site of social change. It is in the family that new gender identities are forged, new expectations are formed, new possibilities are imagined and tested. It is in the family that the abstract principles of equality and autonomy are translated or fail to be translated – into the concrete practices of daily life.

Epilogue: The unfinished revolution, In 1989, Arlie Hochschild published *The Second Shift*, a landmark study of working couples and the domestic division of labour. More than three decades later, her diagnosis of a 'stalled revolution' remains tragically accurate.

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Women have transformed their lives, their aspirations, their identities; they have entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, achieved remarkable levels of education, attained positions of power and influence that were unimaginable to their grandmothers. But men have not changed at the same pace; the domestic sphere remains, in large measure, feminine territory, and the mental load remains, in large measure, a feminine burden.

Why has the revolution stalled? This chapter has offered several interconnected explanations:

- **Structural inertia:** Labour markets, public policies and social institutions continue to be organised around the assumption of a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. Change in these structures is slow and contested.
- **Cultural lag:** Norms and values change more slowly than material conditions. The ideology of separate spheres, the association of femininity with care and masculinity with providerhood, the myth of maternal instinct these cultural formations persist long after the conditions that produced them have disappeared.
- **Psychological depth:** Gender identities are formed early, through complex processes of identification and socialisation, and are anchored in deep emotional attachments. Changing these identities requires more than rational persuasion; it requires profound emotional work.
- **Asymmetric change:** Women have changed more than men, and this asymmetry itself creates resistance. Women's greater willingness to take on new roles and responsibilities has, paradoxically, made it possible for men to change less.

Is the revolution doomed? No. The evidence of change, however slow and uneven, is undeniable. The 'new father' may still be a minority, but he is a growing minority. The mental load may still be primarily feminine, but it is increasingly named, recognised and contested. The unequal division of domestic labour may still be the norm, but it is a norm that has lost its legitimacy and this delegitimation is itself a crucial change. The revolution will not be completed by individual effort alone. It requires collective action social movements that demand policy change, trade unions that organise domestic workers, feminist collectives that challenge cultural representations, political parties that put gender equality at the centre of their programmes.

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It requires institutional transformation – parental leave policies that enable and encourage fathers' involvement, childcare services that relieve families of the care burden, labour market regulations that penalise discrimination and support work-life balance. It requires cultural change – representations of masculinity and femininity that are diverse, complex and non-hierarchical; educational curricula that teach boys and girls the skills of care and domestic work; public discourses that value care as a collective, not individual, responsibility.

But the revolution will also be completed by millions of individual efforts by mothers who resist the pressure to be perfect and allow themselves to be imperfect; by fathers who insist on taking paternity leave even when it is socially penalised; by couples who struggle, sometimes awkwardly and imperfectly, to share the mental load; by teenagers who refuse to reproduce the gendered patterns they observed in their parents' generation; by grandparents who learn new ways of being masculine and feminine.

The family is both the site of the problem and the site of the solution. It is in the family that gender inequality is most persistently reproduced; but it is also in the family that new forms of equality are most concretely enacted. The family is the arena of the stalled revolution; but it is also the arena of its possible completion.

We do not know how long this revolution will take. We do not know what forms it will take, what obstacles it will encounter, what compromises and setbacks it will suffer. But we know that it is necessary – not only for women, who continue to bear an unjust and exhausting burden, but also for men, who are impoverished by their exclusion from the domain of care and emotion, and for children, who deserve to grow up in families where both parents are fully present and fully responsible.

We know that it is possible because we see it, fragmentarily and imperfectly, in the lives of those who have refused to accept that inequality is inevitable. And we know that it is worth fighting for – because the stakes could not be higher. At stake is not merely the distribution of domestic tasks, but the very meaning of equality, justice and human flourishing. The unfinished revolution is waiting to be completed. It is waiting for us.

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CHAPTER 2
THE PINK TAX AS A GENDERED
SOCIOECONOMIC ISSUE: CHALLENGES AND
POLICY RESPONSES

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INTRODUCTION

The term *pink tax* refers to a form of gender-based price differentiation whereby products and services marketed toward women are systematically priced higher than comparable products marketed toward men. Importantly, the pink tax does not constitute an official governmental levy; rather, it describes a market phenomenon rooted in pricing strategies and consumer segmentation practices (Bessendorf, 2015; New York City Department of Consumer Affairs [NYC DCA], 2015).

From an economic perspective, the pink tax can be interpreted as a manifestation of third-degree price discrimination, wherein firms segment consumers into groups based on identifiable characteristics—in this case, gender—and adjust pricing according to perceived willingness to pay (Varian, 2014). In many instances, the price differences are not justified by substantial variations in production costs, but instead by differences in branding, packaging, design, or marketing strategies. Products targeted at women frequently differ from male-oriented equivalents primarily in color (often pink), fragrance, or labeling, yet are sold at higher prices.

Empirical evidence suggests that gender-based price disparities are present across multiple sectors, including personal care products, clothing, toys, dry-cleaning services, and haircuts (NYC DCA, 2015). A large-scale comparative study conducted in the United States found that women’s products cost, on average, 7% more than similar products for men, with the largest disparities observed in personal care categories. Similar patterns have been identified in European markets, where consumer protection agencies have reported systematic price differences linked to gendered marketing (European Commission, 2018).

The pink tax has broader socioeconomic implications, particularly when considered in conjunction with the gender pay gap. Since women, on average, earn less than men in many countries, gender-based pricing practices may exacerbate cumulative lifetime financial inequality (World Economic Forum, 2023). Moreover, essential goods such as menstrual hygiene products have historically been subject to value-added taxes (VAT), prompting debates about fiscal fairness and so-called “tampon tax” reforms (Smith, 2020).

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In response, several countries have reduced or eliminated taxes on such products, recognizing their essential nature. Critically, the pink tax raises normative concerns related to market fairness, consumer rights, and structural gender inequality. While defenders of differentiated pricing argue that it reflects standard market segmentation and consumer demand patterns, critics maintain that it reinforces gender stereotypes and contributes to systemic economic disadvantages for women (Bessendorf, 2015).

We realize that male and female versions of products often differ from one another in branding, construction, and ingredients. However, individual consumers do not have control over the textiles or ingredients used in the products marketed to them and must make purchasing choices based only on what is available in the marketplace. The selected products that had similar male and female versions and were closest in branding, ingredients, appearance, textile, construction, and/or marketing. In this way, the findings of the study represent a female consumer's experience in the marketplace, which includes unavoidable higher prices for women's products.

Some defenders of price differentiation frame it as market segmentation that reflects legitimate differences in consumer preferences and willingness to pay. Critics counter that such justifications obscure the role of socialization and marketing in shaping preferences, and that acceptance of gendered pricing normalizes inequality (Bessendorf, 2015). Methodological critiques also highlight issues of product comparability, selection bias in market scans, and cross-national differences in consumption patterns that complicate simple generalizations.

In conclusion, the pink tax represents a complex intersection of economic theory, marketing strategy, and gender studies. As a market-driven phenomenon rather than a statutory tax, it reflects broader dynamics of consumer behavior, profit maximization, and social inequality. Ongoing academic and policy discussions focus on transparency, regulatory intervention, and the ethical implications of gender-based pricing.

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1. PINK TAX: GENERAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Historical Context of Gender-Based Pricing Research

In 1992, the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) conducted an investigation into gender-based price discrimination in the marketplace, publishing its findings in a report titled *Gypped by Gender*. The study (New York (N.Y.) Department of Consumer Affairs, 1992) revealed that women were charged higher prices than men for various goods and services, including used cars, dry cleaning, laundry services, and haircuts. A significant challenge in addressing this issue was the lack of consumer awareness regarding price disparities. Even decades later, with more access to information, many price-conscious female shoppers remain unaware that lower-priced alternatives may be available in men's sections.

The 1992 report found that women purchasing used cars were twice as likely to receive higher price quotes than men. Additionally, an analysis of 80 hair salons across New York City's five boroughs showed that women, on average, paid 25% more for the same haircut as men. Similarly, women were charged 27% more for laundering an identical white cotton shirt (New York (N.Y.) Department of Consumer Affairs, 1992).

DCA's research initiated a nationwide discussion on gender-based pricing, prompting several states to conduct their own studies. A 1994 California study estimated that women effectively paid an annual "gender tax" of \$1,351. Florida, Connecticut, and South Dakota also began investigating and publishing reports on the issue. In response, California became the first state in 1995 to pass legislation prohibiting gender-based price discrimination in services, followed by Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., and parts of Virginia. In 1998, the New York City Council relied on DCA's research to pass a law banning gender-based service pricing. However, no similar laws exist to regulate gender-based pricing of goods (Blasio & Menin, 2022).

The New York City law introduced a rule under the Consumer Affairs section of the city's Administrative Code, granting the agency authority to issue violations to dry cleaners, hair salons, and other service establishments that unlawfully price services based on gender. Businesses were required to ensure that price lists reflected actual labor differences rather than gender distinctions.

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For example, instead of categorizing garments as "shirts" and "blouses" (which inherently imply gender differences), pricing had to be based on labor-intensive characteristics such as ruffles or pleats. Gender-based pricing remains a persistent issue. In 2014 and 2015, DCA issued 118 and 129 violations, respectively, for non-compliance with the gender pricing law. A 2011 study from the University of Central Florida reaffirmed the findings of DCA's 1992 report, demonstrating that women continued to pay more than men for a variety of personal care products and services, including deodorant, haircuts, and dry cleaning. The study further emphasized that while individual price discrepancies may seem minor, their cumulative financial impact over time is significant (Blasio & Menin, 2022). Despite growing interest, important gaps in the literature and directions for future research remain. First, longitudinal evidence on the cumulative financial impact of gendered pricing across cohorts is scarce. Second, much of the empirical work is concentrated in high-income countries; more research is needed in transition and developing economies (where consumption patterns and tax regimes differ). Third, mixed-methods studies that combine price matching with discourse analysis (marketing content, retailer strategy) can better reveal the mechanisms linking gendered marketing to pricing outcomes. Finally, there is a need for comparative policy evaluation to identify which regulatory interventions (tax exemptions, anti-discrimination pricing rules, consumer transparency mandates) are most effective in limiting gendered price differentials.

1.2 Gender-Discriminatory Pricing Mechanisms

Detection of discriminatory pricing can become part of financial inequality, reducing women's purchasing power. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in America, women earn 82 cents for every dollar paid to men. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, this statistic worsens for women of color and other marginalized groups. Women are also more likely to experience stress related to their finances than men, as found by Bankrate in June 2022. According to the BLS, women are also likely to spend more proportionally to their income compared to men, as the average single woman spends more on housing, healthcare, clothing, and services due to the cost of living, family size, and other factors.

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As of 2021, the average single adult woman in the U.S. earned \$39,178 annually and spent \$38,838, compared to the average single adult man, who earned \$49,525 annually and spent \$41,203. Certain categories of goods and services that are inherently gender-neutral, meaning they perform the same functions, are often sold to women at higher prices. These include hairdressing services, personal hygiene products, clothing, children's goods, medications, and automobiles

Overall, cosmetic products for different genders can have identical compositions but differ in price and packaging. This trend is evident with the Clinique brand. Customers noted that the Superdefense cream for women is no different from the Super Energizer cream for men—they have the same ingredients, scent, and texture. The difference lies in the presentation: the women's version promises to fight the first signs of aging, while the men's version claims to hide signs of fatigue and hydrate. The women's version is significantly more expensive: considering the different container sizes, the price difference is 37%. The same situation applies to hair shampoos. Labels on "women's" bottles include a few additional features, allowing the product to be sold 48% higher than a similar product for men (Carefoot, 2022).

DCA analyzed seven types of clothing: dress pants, dress shirts, sweaters, jeans, shirts, socks, and underwear. In total, 292 individual articles of clothing were included in the analysis, with at least 40 items for each type of clothing. Price Analysis On average, women's clothing cost nearly 8 percent more than men's. In total, one of each average item cost women \$307.38 and cost men \$285.85, a difference of \$21.53. On average, the largest price discrepancy was in shirts, costing women nearly 15 percent more, with an average difference of \$3.72 per shirt. Dress shirts came a close second, costing women nearly 13 percent more, with an average difference of \$6.65 per shirt. Men's clothing cost more in only one category, underwear, at an average difference of nearly 29 percent or \$2.44.

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Table 1. Average Price, Adult Clothing

(<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Study-of-Gender-Pricing-in-NYC.pdf>)

Products	Number of Products*	Women's Average	Men's Average	Price Difference	Percent Difference
Dress Pants	40	\$75.66	\$71.71	\$3.95	6%
Dress Shirts	40	\$58.11	\$51.46	\$6.65	13%
Sweaters	42	\$63.19	\$59.45	\$3.74	6%
Jeans	50	\$62.75	\$57.09	\$5.66	10%
Shirts	40	\$29.23	\$25.51	\$3.72	15%
Socks	40	\$9.98	\$9.73	\$0.25	3%
Underwear	40	\$8.46	\$10.90	(\$2.44)	29%
Total	292	\$307.38	\$285.85	\$21.53	8%

Of course, women’s and men’s clothing are constructed differently, resulting in different manufacturing costs. Textiles are a main driver of differences in production costs, with women’s clothing tending to be made with a more costly blend of fabrics and men’s clothing, more often, being made with one type of fabric. Other pricing factors are the number of styles available: an offering of regular, tall, and petite styles for a single product will result in a higher manufacturing cost. Similarly, how an item is cut—men tend to have straight-cut clothing, whereas women’s cuts are curvier—may result in more fabric waste.^{34 35} However, according to experts at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), these costs are not necessarily commensurate with the retail-price differences identified in this study, as the manufacturing cost of an article of clothing is a small fraction of the ultimate retail price.

The "pink tax" is particularly evident in children's stores, where products are often color-coded according to gender, typically in pink and blue. Toys designed for girls, often in pink and purple hues, are frequently sold at higher prices. Data from the Disney children's store further support the trend of price inequality, revealing that only 17% of their products can be classified as "gender-neutral." The remaining products are subject to gender-based color differentiation, primarily in pink and blue, which subsequently allows for price variation between toys targeted at boys and girls.

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1.3 Media Representations of the Pink Tax

Although the concept of the “pink tax” originates primarily in economic and policy discourse, media representations—both fictional and non-fictional—have played a significant role in shaping public awareness of gender-based price discrimination. The pink tax is rarely addressed explicitly in mainstream cinema; however, themes of gendered consumption, unequal economic burdens, and market segmentation frequently appear in documentaries, journalism, and feminist non-fiction.

For example, in *Mad Money* (2008), we notice not only pink tax per se. This comedy heist film starring Diane Keaton, Queen Latifah, and Katie Holmes includes subtle commentary on economic inequality and how financial burdens impact women’s lives. The characters talk about the financial realities of ordinary women — showing how small economic pressures add up. Though not explicitly about price discrimination, it reflects broader themes relevant to discussions of unequal economic burdens.

Documentary media, particularly investigative segments produced by outlets such as Vox and CBC, visually demonstrate price comparisons between nearly identical male- and female-marketed products (e.g., razors, deodorants, personal care items). These representations rely on side-by-side product displays, receipts, and consumer testimonies to construct a persuasive narrative of systemic disparity. The visual modality strengthens the argument by translating abstract economic inequality into tangible consumer experience, thereby making the concept accessible to broader audiences.

In feminist non-fiction literature, such as Caroline Criado Perez’s *Invisible Women* (2019), the pink tax is framed within a broader critique of gender data gaps and structural economic bias. Rather than focusing solely on retail pricing, such works contextualize gendered consumption within institutional and historical patterns of inequality.

This narrative strategy shifts the discussion from individual purchasing decisions to systemic market design.

Media discourse tends to emphasize the cumulative lifetime cost borne by women, reinforcing the notion that gender-based pricing is not an isolated anomaly but part of a broader economic structure.

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Through multimodal strategies combining visuals, statistics, personal narratives, and expert commentary media representations contribute to the normalization of the pink tax as a recognized social issue. Thus, while fictional portrayals remain limited, journalistic and documentary media function as key agents in constructing public understanding of gender-based price discrimination, bridging academic research and everyday consumer awareness.

1.4 Comparative Regulatory Approaches: United States vs. European Union

The regulatory responses to such practices differ markedly between the United States and the European Union, reflecting divergent legal traditions, institutional structures, and normative frameworks regarding equality and market governance.

In the United States, price differentiation is generally considered lawful unless it violates competition law, constitutes fraud, or falls under specific anti-discrimination statutes. Federal law does not explicitly prohibit gender-based pricing of consumer goods. Instead, regulatory oversight is primarily exercised through consumer protection legislation enforced by agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). These laws focus on deceptive or unfair business practices rather than structural price inequalities.

The pink tax debate gained prominence following studies such as *From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer* (New York City Department of Consumer Affairs [NYC DCA], 2015), which documented systematic price differences in gender-targeted products. However, federal legislative action has been limited. Instead, reforms have largely occurred at the state level, particularly regarding the elimination of sales taxes on menstrual hygiene products—commonly referred to as the “tampon tax.” These reforms address tax policy inequities rather than broader gendered pricing practices.

Scholarly analysis in the U.S. often frames the pink tax within consumer economics and behavioral marketing, emphasizing market segmentation strategies and brand differentiation (Gavilan et al., 2018). Critics argue that absent federal regulation, market forces alone may perpetuate systemic disparities (Stiglitz, 2002).

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In contrast, the European Union adopts a rights-based approach grounded in the principle of gender equality enshrined in Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. A key instrument is Directive 2004/113/EC (Goods and Services Directive), which prohibits direct and indirect discrimination based on gender in access to and supply of goods and services.

This directive explicitly restricts unjustified gender-based price differentiation. Following the landmark *Test-Achats* decision (Case C-236/09, 2011), the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that insurance premiums and benefits may no longer differ based on gender, reinforcing the principle of actuarial neutrality.

Moreover, EU consumer protection mechanisms operate through coordinated enforcement between the European Commission and national authorities under the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation. VAT policy has also been used as a corrective tool: recent amendments to the EU VAT Directive allow Member States to apply reduced or zero VAT rates to essential goods, including menstrual hygiene products (European Commission, 2018).

Academic literature characterizes the EU approach as structurally integrated, combining anti-discrimination law, competition policy, and consumer protection within a unified equality framework (Schiek, 2011).

The divergence between the U.S. and EU approaches reflects broader philosophical differences:

- The **U.S. system** emphasizes market autonomy and reactive enforcement through general consumer protection laws.
- The **EU system** embeds gender equality as a foundational legal principle, enabling proactive regulation of discriminatory pricing.

While U.S. policy responses often focus on tax adjustments and consumer awareness, EU law directly addresses gender-based price discrimination under binding legal obligations. Consequently, enforcement in the EU may be more systematic and rights-oriented, whereas in the U.S., remedies remain fragmented and decentralized.

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So, the comparison demonstrates that regulatory frameworks significantly shape the treatment of gender-based price disparities. The U.S. approach prioritizes market freedom with limited targeted intervention, whereas the EU integrates anti-discrimination principles into commercial regulation. These contrasting models illustrate how economic governance structures reflect broader normative commitments to equality and social justice. Understanding these differences is essential for evaluating policy options aimed at addressing gendered price inequalities in global markets.

1.5 Future Trajectories of the Pink Tax

The *pink tax* has garnered increasing attention over the past few decades, driven by growing awareness among consumers, advocacy groups, and policymakers (Yang et al., 2019), (Lafferty, 2022), (Pant, 2021). The future of the *pink tax* is shaped by several evolving factors, including societal changes, legislative actions, market shifts, and consumer demand for greater transparency and fairness in pricing.

Increasing Public Awareness and Consumer Demand for Equality

Rising consumer awareness and demand for fairness in pricing are expected to drive increased transparency regarding gender-based pricing. Platforms such as social media, online forums, and consumer advocacy groups are amplifying discussions on this issue, making it increasingly difficult for companies to maintain discriminatory pricing without facing significant pushback. As consumers become more conscious of the *pink tax*, purchasing patterns are shifting, with more individuals choosing gender-neutral or unisex products. This trend may ultimately reduce the emphasis on gender-specific pricing. Consequently, businesses may need to revise their marketing and pricing strategies to align with the growing demand for fairness and more cost-conscious consumer choices.

Legislative and Regulatory Changes

Over the past few decades, there has been a gradual but notable push for legislative action to curb price discrimination based on gender.

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Cities like New York, states such as California, and various national governments have enacted or proposed laws banning gender-based pricing in certain industries, particularly services. In the future, we may see expanded legal frameworks that target a broader range of sectors, including retail, cosmetics, and healthcare. This could involve stricter regulations requiring businesses to justify gender-based price differences, disclose detailed pricing structures, and adopt gender-neutral marketing practices. Enforcement mechanisms could become more robust, with penalties for non-compliance, and governments may introduce incentives for businesses that voluntarily adopt fair pricing practices.

Shift Towards Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Marketing

The global trend toward greater gender equality and inclusivity is influencing how businesses approach marketing and product development. In response to the *pink tax*, many companies are opting for gender-neutral product lines, eliminating the need to differentiate between "men's" and "women's" products. This trend is particularly evident in industries such as clothing, cosmetics, and toys, where companies are moving away from color-based or gender-specific branding. The shift toward inclusive marketing not only appeals to a growing demographic of consumers who reject gendered marketing but also helps businesses tap into new markets where gender-neutral or unisex products are gaining popularity. As more companies embrace this approach, the *pink tax* could eventually diminish as gender-neutral products become the norm.

Technological Innovation and Price Transparency

Technological advancements and the proliferation of e-commerce platforms have made it easier for consumers to compare prices across different products and retailers. Online price comparison tools, digital shopping assistants, and customer-driven platforms are enhancing price transparency, enabling consumers to identify and avoid price discrimination based on gender. As these tools become more sophisticated, they could serve as a powerful force in combating the *pink tax*, as consumers will have the means to quickly identify and reject overpriced gendered products in favor of fair-priced alternatives.

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Furthermore, the rise of data analytics and artificial intelligence in retail could allow businesses to more accurately assess demand and optimize pricing strategies, reducing the need for arbitrary gender-based pricing.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethical Business Practices

As corporate social responsibility (CSR) becomes an increasingly important factor in consumer decision-making, businesses are under growing pressure to demonstrate ethical practices, including fair pricing policies. Many companies are now more attuned to the importance of gender equality and are recognizing the reputational risks associated with engaging in discriminatory pricing practices. As a result, it is likely that we will see a greater emphasis on ethical business practices that align with social justice movements and consumer expectations. Companies that champion gender equity, diversity, and fairness may stand out in the market, attracting consumers who value these principles, and leading the way in creating more equitable pricing structures.

Challenges and Obstacles

Despite the growing momentum against the *pink tax*, there are significant challenges to fully eliminating gender-based price discrimination. One major obstacle is the deeply ingrained cultural and marketing traditions that associate certain products with gendered identities. In industries like fashion, beauty, and personal care, the appeal of products often hinges on gendered branding, which can create resistance to abandoning gendered pricing altogether. Additionally, while some businesses may adopt gender-neutral marketing strategies, others may continue to exploit consumer behavior and preferences, capitalizing on perceived gender differences to maintain higher profit margins. Overcoming these obstacles will require concerted efforts from both consumers and policymakers to hold businesses accountable for fair pricing practices. To conclude, the future trajectory of the *pink tax* is inherently linked to ongoing societal, economic, and political transformations. Despite the progress made in increasing awareness and addressing gender-based pricing disparities, significant challenges persist. However, as the demand for equality and inclusivity among consumers continues to grow, alongside evolving legislative and market dynamics, the *pink tax* may ultimately become obsolete.

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In the foreseeable future, it is plausible that more businesses will embrace transparent and equitable pricing models, while stronger legislative frameworks and regulatory measures promoting gender parity in pricing could be established. As these developments unfold, the marketplace is expected to become increasingly equitable, ensuring that consumers, irrespective of gender, will no longer face price discrimination in their purchasing decisions. As we see, the issue of price discrimination on gender-neutral goods remains relevant today.

Price discrimination based on gender primarily affects products and services traditionally associated with a specific gender, including clothing, cosmetics, personal hygiene products, and children's toys. Overall, gender-based price discrimination not only contributes to financial inequality between men and women but also increases financial burdens on women, particularly when considering average income levels and additional expenses they may face. Raising consumer awareness about the "pink tax" is essential to influencing purchasing behavior. Reducing consumer demand for gender-differentiated products could drive changes in marketing strategies and business practices. In turn, such shifts would help mitigate financial disparities and promote greater economic equity.

1. PINK TAX IN MOLDOVA

1.1 Gender-Economic Context

Scholarly work explicitly addressing the pink tax in Moldova is nascent but visible in local academic outputs and conference proceedings. For instance, student and faculty conference papers from Moldovan universities have begun to address gender-based pricing, consumer behavior, and the marketing practices that sustain price differentials (e.g., conference papers and institutional repositories referencing "pink tax" and gender-neutral product marketing). These works typically use market scan methods and survey instruments to measure local prevalence and consumer perceptions, and they point to similar mechanisms found internationally: product differentiation by packaging/branding rather than cost-of-production differences. International studies provide methodological guidance useful for Moldova.

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Market scan approaches (matching male/female product variants), household expenditure analyses, and mixed-methods designs (quantitative price comparisons + qualitative interviews on marketing and retailer rationales) have been widely used to document the pink tax in other settings (e.g., NYC DCA and European Commission studies). These approaches can be adapted to Moldova's retail structure and product mix to produce robust evidence for policy. The international literature also stresses the need to control for product heterogeneity and retail segmentation when interpreting price differences as discriminatory rather than market-driven.

In the Moldovan context the most visible and widely discussed manifestation of gendered pricing is taxation and pricing of menstrual hygiene products (so-called "tampon tax"), though local academic and policy attention to other forms of gendered price discrimination is emerging only recently (conference papers, student research). Empirical research specifically focused on Moldova remains limited; however, several policy and civil-society reports provide useful context and entry points for local analysis.

To interpret the significance of gendered pricing in Moldova, it is necessary to situate the pink tax within the country's broader gender-inequality and labour-market profile. National assessments and policy studies (e.g., Expert-Grup, World Bank related assessments) document persistent gender gaps in income, labour market participation, and economic outcomes that interact with consumption-side disadvantages.

Let's Focus on Some of Them

The *Country Gender Profile: Republic of Moldova* (NIRAS, 2021) provides a comprehensive assessment of gender equality in Moldova, with the objective of informing EU and national policy planning for the 2021–2027 period. The report evaluates the country's legal framework, socio-economic conditions, institutional capacity, and policy implementation from a gender perspective.

Although Moldova has adopted significant legislative measures promoting equal opportunities between women and men and ratified key international conventions, the report identifies substantial implementation gaps. The profile highlights significant gender disparities in several areas:

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- **Economic participation and income** – Women are less represented in decision-making positions, under-represented in higher-paid sectors, and often concentrated in precarious or low-paid employment.
- **Poverty and rural disadvantage** – Female-headed households, especially in rural areas, have higher poverty rates than male-headed households.
- **Entrepreneurship** – Women participate less as employers and often run smaller, retail-oriented businesses with limited access to finance and resources.

The profile also highlights gender-based violence as a major social issue, emphasizing deficiencies in prevention mechanisms, survivor support services, and access to justice. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, increasing women's unpaid care burden and economic vulnerability.

A central output of the CGP is a series of **recommendations** aimed at supporting the Government of Moldova, civil society, and development partners to strengthen gender equality. These include:

- Improving **gender-disaggregated data** and evidence bases;
- Enhancing implementation of legal protections and gender-responsive budgeting;
- Promoting women's economic empowerment and political participation;
- Strengthening mechanisms to prevent and respond to gender-based violence;
- Addressing disparities in access to services, employment, and leadership opportunities.

It concludes that while Moldova has established a formal framework for gender equality, achieving substantive equality requires stronger enforcement, resource allocation, and systematic mainstreaming of gender across all policy sectors. The purpose of the report *The economic cost of gender inequalities in the Republic of Moldova* (Expert-Grup, 2020) is to estimate the economic costs caused by gender inequalities in the Republic of Moldova and identify a series of strategic recommendations. This report assesses the latest developments related to gender inequalities in the Republic of Moldova, especially from the perspective of changes in demographical statistics and on the labour market.

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Economic costs of gender inequalities are calculated on the basis of these developments, taking into account the methodological approaches already applied at the international level.

Table 2. Score and Classification of the Republic of Moldova in GGGI
Annex 1. Score and classification of the Republic of Moldova in GGGI (0 – inequality, 1 – equality)

	2006	2010	2015	2019
Score				
Total	0.713	0.716	0.712	0.757
<i>Participation and economic opportunities</i>	0.760	0.771	0.671	0.788
<i>Enrolment in education</i>	0.994	0.990	0.996	0.996
<i>Health and life expectancy</i>	0.980	0.980	0.974	0.980
<i>Political empowerment</i>	0.117	0.124	0.205	0.264
Classification				
Total	17	34	53	23
<i>Participation and economic opportunities</i>	2	10	71	19
<i>Enrolment in education</i>	37	66	51	61
<i>Health and life expectancy</i>	1	1	69	1
<i>Political empowerment</i>	50	69	54	45
Countries in the classification	115	135	145	153

Source: World Economic Forum

According to the economic cost of gender inequalities in the Republic of Moldova (Expert-Grup, 2020), development of institutional and legal framework concerning reconciliation of family life and professional duties is one of the public policies that could diminish gender inequalities. Good international practices and peculiarities of the Republic of Moldova are analysed in order to identify possible areas of intervention of public authorities. A particular emphasis is placed on the early childhood education and the potential costs for its extension in the Republic of Moldova, aiming at determining to what extent the implementation of this public policy is possible. Finally, this report includes a series of recommendations that could diminish gender inequalities and their economic costs. As we see, recent studies underline that Moldova continues to experience a measurable gender pay gap and labor market segmentation factors that amplify the regressive impact of gendered pricing.

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In short, the fiscal burden of products such as menstrual hygiene goods accrues on top of income disparities, increasing the economic vulnerability of women.

1.2 Consumer Perceptions: Empirical Evidence

As it was mentioned above, student and faculty conference papers from Moldovan universities have begun to address gender-based pricing, consumer behavior, and the marketing practices that sustain price differentials. To examine consumer attitudes toward price discrimination on gender-neutral goods in the Republic of Moldova, an online survey was conducted (Solomahina 2024). The study aimed to assess consumer awareness of the “pink tax” phenomenon and investigate perceived differences in pricing between products marketed toward men and women. Respondents were asked both closed and open-ended questions regarding their purchasing experiences, perceptions of gender-based pricing disparities, and opinions on gender differentiation in consumer goods.

The majority of survey participants were female (72%), with the predominant age group being 18 to 25 years old (63.6%). When asked whether they were familiar with the term "pink tax," responses were divided: 51.5% indicated they were unfamiliar with the term and its meaning, whereas 36.4% reported being aware of it. Furthermore, most respondents considered the Moldovan market an environment where gender-based product categorization is widely accepted. To gain further insights into consumer perceptions of gendered product differentiation, participants were asked to identify which product categories could be classified as "male" or "female." The categories provided included personal hygiene products, clothing, pharmaceuticals, children's products, hairdressing services, automobiles, or the option that no such categorization exists. The most frequently selected categories were clothing (72.7%) and personal hygiene products (69.7%), followed by hairdressing services (57.6%) and children's products (54.5%).

A key aspect of the survey explored whether respondents had encountered price differences for comparable products or services marketed toward men and women. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents had experienced such disparities.

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To further assess consumer perceptions, respondents were shown an image of two shampoos one labeled "for men" in blue packaging and the other labeled "for women" in pink packaging—and were asked whether they believed these products differed in composition or price. The majority indicated that both the composition and pricing differed, while a significant proportion believed that the difference was primarily in price rather than formulation. Additionally, the survey examined the role of color in consumer decision-making. When asked about the importance of color in selecting children's clothing, 54.5% of respondents stated that it was not a significant factor. To test perceptions of gender-based pricing disparities, respondents were shown two identical children's balance bikes differing only in color one blue and one pink—and asked whether the prices were the same or different. Most respondents assumed price parity; however, market data from a Russian e-commerce platform indicated that the pink variant was priced 12% higher than the blue counterpart.

Further analysis explored consumer opinions regarding the existence of gender-based price discrepancies. A significant majority of respondents perceived "women's" products as being more expensive than equivalent "men's" products. To gain deeper insights, an open-ended question was posed at the end of the survey to determine whether respondents had encountered gender-based pricing disparities firsthand. Many reported frequent exposure to such pricing structures, particularly in categories such as personal hygiene products, clothing, and footwear. Notably, respondents highlighted that women's razors are often sold at higher prices despite being functionally similar to men's razors. Similar disparities were observed in clothing, footwear, and the beauty industry, particularly in hairdressing services.

The findings of this study (Solomahina 2024). suggest that Moldovan consumers frequently perceive and experience price discrepancies based on gender differentiation. While many consumers believe that gender-neutral products should be priced equivalently and do not attribute significance to product color variations (e.g., pink vs. blue), real-world pricing structures suggest that products marketed toward women often incur a higher cost. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on gender-based pricing discrimination and highlight the need for further research into the economic and social implications of such disparities within the Moldovan market.

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The results of the conducted survey indicate that consumers in the Republic of Moldova experience the effects of the “pink tax,” as many functionally identical products are sold at different prices for men and women. This phenomenon is largely driven by marketing strategies aimed at maximizing profits and increasing sales, such as using gendered packaging (e.g., blue and pink colors), differentiated designs, and targeted advertising claims.

1.3 Pink Tax in the Context of European Integration

European integration requires not only legislative approximation but also adherence to EU principles of non-discrimination and gender equality. The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 emphasizes economic independence, reduction of gender gaps, and elimination of structural discrimination. In Moldova, persistent gender pay gaps, labor market segregation, and higher poverty risks among women amplify the cumulative impact of gender-based consumption costs. Even relatively small price differences can have regressive effects when combined with income inequality.

Thus, addressing the pink tax is not merely a consumer issue but also a question of structural economic justice, consistent with EU standards on equality and social cohesion. In the European Union context, gender equality is a foundational value and is mainstreamed across policy areas, including economic governance, consumer rights, and taxation. For the Republic of Moldova, which holds EU candidate status and is aligning its legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire*, the issue of the pink tax must be examined within the broader framework of European integration, gender mainstreaming, and harmonization of fiscal and consumer protection policies.

In the context of EU accession, Moldova’s fiscal policy alignment presents an opportunity to reconsider VAT treatment of gender-specific essential goods. Harmonization with EU best practices could involve, for example, reduction or elimination of VAT on menstrual products. In Moldova, the most concrete and documented aspect of the pink tax concerns the taxation of menstrual hygiene products. These products are subject to the standard VAT rate (20%), which places a disproportionate burden on women as primary consumers of these essential goods.

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Within the EU, significant reforms have taken place regarding VAT on menstrual products. Following amendments to EU VAT Directive 2006/112/EC, Member States were granted flexibility to apply reduced or even zero VAT rates to essential goods, including menstrual hygiene products. Several EU countries have since reduced or abolished VAT on such items. Such reforms would demonstrate Moldova's commitment to EU gender equality standards and social policy convergence.

EU consumer protection policy emphasizes transparency, fairness, and protection against misleading or discriminatory practices. Although the EU does not explicitly prohibit gender-based pricing per se, discriminatory pricing of identical goods without objective justification may conflict with principles of fair competition and consumer protection.

As Moldova aligns its consumer protection legislation with EU directives, authorities could:

- Conduct market monitoring of gender-based pricing practices
- Introduce transparency requirements for pricing of gendered products
- Strengthen the role of consumer protection agencies

Despite potential benefits, several constraints must be considered:

- Budgetary implications of VAT reductions
- Administrative capacity for market oversight
- Limited public awareness of the pink tax phenomenon
- Need for empirical national data on gender-based price disparities

Without robust local evidence, policy reforms may lack sufficient analytical grounding.

To sum up, in the context of European integration, the pink tax in Moldova represents both a challenge and an opportunity. While currently most visible through VAT treatment of menstrual products, the issue reflects broader structural gender inequalities within consumption and income distribution.

Alignment with EU gender equality strategies, fiscal flexibility under EU VAT frameworks, and strengthened consumer protection mechanisms offer Moldova pathways to address gender-based pricing disparities. Addressing the pink tax could thus serve as a tangible example of substantive Europeanization not merely legal harmonization, but practical advancement of gender equality and social justice.

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CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the pink tax as a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of market strategy, gender inequality, and public policy. The analysis demonstrates that gender-based price differentiation, although not formally institutionalized as a tax, operates as a persistent market practice that can contribute to cumulative economic disadvantage for women. Grounded in the theory of third-degree price discrimination, the pink tax reflects firms' segmentation strategies but simultaneously raises normative concerns regarding fairness, consumer protection, and structural inequality.

The review of international evidence confirms that gendered pricing disparities are observable across multiple product categories and geographic contexts. At the same time, methodological debates remind us that not all price differences are inherently discriminatory; careful product matching and market analysis remain essential for robust conclusions. Nevertheless, the weight of empirical studies and consumer perceptions suggests that branding, packaging, and gendered marketing frequently play a decisive role in price differentiation beyond cost-based justification. The comparative analysis of regulatory approaches highlights important institutional contrasts. The United States largely relies on market-driven mechanisms and fragmented state-level interventions, whereas the European Union embeds gender equality within a broader rights-based regulatory framework. These differences illustrate how legal traditions and policy priorities shape the extent to which gender-based pricing is recognized and addressed as a public policy issue.

Within the Moldovan context, the pink tax debate is still emerging but must be interpreted against the backdrop of persistent gender gaps in income, labor market participation, and economic security. Existing studies and survey evidence indicate that Moldovan consumers are increasingly aware of gendered pricing practices, particularly in personal care products, clothing, and services. The taxation of menstrual hygiene products remains the most visible manifestation of gendered fiscal burden. Given Moldova's EU candidate status, alignment with European gender equality standards, VAT flexibility, and consumer protection norms creates a window of opportunity for proactive policy development.

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Looking forward, the future trajectory of the pink tax will likely depend on several mutually reinforcing dynamics: rising consumer awareness, expansion of gender-neutral marketing, advances in price transparency technologies, and growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility. However, deeply embedded marketing traditions, limited national data, and fiscal constraints may slow reform efforts. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across regulatory bodies, businesses, civil society, and research institutions.

In policy terms, a balanced approach appears most promising. Rather than blanket price controls, governments—particularly in transition economies such as Moldova—may prioritize: (i) enhanced market monitoring and gender-disaggregated consumer data; (ii) greater pricing transparency requirements; (iii) gender-responsive budgeting measures, including reconsideration of VAT on essential gender-specific goods; and (iv) public awareness initiatives that empower consumers to make informed choices. Such measures align with EU gender mainstreaming principles while preserving market flexibility.

Ultimately, the pink tax should be understood not merely as a pricing anomaly but as an indicator of broader structural dynamics in gendered consumption and market behavior. Continued interdisciplinary research—combining economic analysis, legal evaluation, and discourse-oriented approaches—is essential for clarifying the scope of the phenomenon and identifying effective remedies. For the Republic of Moldova, addressing gender-based pricing disparities can serve as a practical step toward deeper Europeanization, social equity, and inclusive economic development.

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CHAPTER 3
**GENDER INEQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN GOMBE
METROPOLIS, NIGERIA**

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains one of the most persistent obstacles to sustainable development globally. Over the past decades, international development institutions, particularly the United Nations, have emphasized gender equality as a core development priority through frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on gender equality (UN, 2015). These frameworks recognize that societies cannot achieve sustainable growth if women are excluded from education, economic opportunity, and decision-making processes. However, while global policies provide direction, their success depends largely on how they interact with local realities. In many developing societies, cultural traditions, informal power structures, and social norms shape daily life more strongly than written laws or international commitments (Kabeer, 2005). As a result, gender inequality often persists at the community level despite national and global policy reforms.

This situation is evident in Gombe Metropolis, the capital of Gombe State in Northeastern Nigeria. The city has experienced steady growth as a centre for trade, agriculture, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Despite these signs of development, deep-rooted gender inequalities remain. Women constitute nearly half of the population and play key roles in farming, petty trading, and household management, yet they are largely excluded from land ownership, access to finance, and positions of authority. This chapter argues that gender inequality in Gombe is not merely a social justice concern but a structural barrier that limits economic productivity, weakens household resilience, and slows overall community development.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical perspectives: Feminist Political Economy and the Capability Approach. Feminist Political Economy highlights how economic resources and political power are distributed along gender lines within societies (Elson, 1998). In many contexts, including Gombe, men are more likely to control land, income, and public decision-making, while women contribute labour without equivalent control over resources. This unequal distribution reinforces long-term poverty and dependency among women.

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The second framework is the Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen (1999). This approach defines development not simply as economic growth, but as the expansion of people's real freedoms and opportunities. Development is meaningful only when individuals have the agency to make choices and act on them. In Gombe, many women experience what Sen describes as "capability deprivation." Limited education, restricted inheritance rights, and poor access to credit reduce women's ability to participate fully in economic and political life. When women lack agency, community development becomes structurally incomplete because a large segment of the population cannot contribute to collective progress.

2. METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between gender inequality and community development in Gombe Metropolis. A total of 392 respondents were sampled across the eleven wards of the metropolis, including densely populated areas such as Pantami, Bolari, and Shamaki. The survey approach was appropriate because it allowed the collection of data on lived experiences, perceptions, and participation patterns among residents (Creswell, 2014).

Questionnaires and guided interviews were administered using simple language to accommodate respondents with limited formal education. The demographic profile of respondents reveals important structural patterns. A large proportion of female respondents were widowed or divorced, placing them in the role of primary household providers. Similar patterns have been observed in other parts of Northern Nigeria, where female-headed households often face higher economic vulnerability (World Bank, 2020).

Educational attainment among respondents was generally low. Nearly 40 percent had only primary education, while only 23.5 percent attained tertiary education. Education level strongly influences civic participation, access to formal employment, and engagement with government institutions (UNDP, 2021). Occupational data further show gender disparities, with men more involved in larger-scale farming and commercial activities, while women dominate petty trading and informal work.

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These demographic characteristics provide the context within which gender inequality affects development outcomes in Gombe.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that gender inequality in Gombe operates through interconnected social, economic, and institutional barriers. Education emerged as a major determinant of participation. Women with limited education reported low confidence in public speaking and difficulty engaging with formal administrative processes. This confirms earlier studies that link education to political participation and empowerment (Kabeer, 2012).

Even where women participate in community meetings or committees, their roles are often symbolic. Decision-making authority, particularly over financial resources and project priorities, remains largely male-dominated. This gap between representation and influence reflects what scholars describe as “tokenism,” where inclusion exists in form but not in substance (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). As a result, development projects may overlook issues such as maternal health, water access, and childcare that directly affect household welfare.

Economic exclusion further reinforces inequality. In an agricultural economy like Gombe, land ownership is a critical source of security and income. Customary inheritance practices frequently prevent widows and divorced women from controlling land, despite their responsibility for household survival. Limited access to credit compounds this problem, restricting business expansion and long-term planning. These findings align with broader evidence that women’s lack of asset ownership reduces household resilience and slows local economic growth (FAO, 2018).

Cultural norms also play a sustaining role. Social expectations often define men as household heads and public decision-makers, while women are expected to focus on domestic roles. Such norms discourage women from seeking leadership positions and weaken enforcement of gender-equal laws (Agarwal, 2010). Together, these factors create a cycle of inequality that limits development outcomes across the metropolis.

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4. RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these challenges, a coordinated and multi-dimensional approach is required. Expanding adult education and vocational training programmes can help improve literacy, confidence, and economic skills among women. Evidence shows that adult education significantly increases women's participation in economic and civic life (UNESCO, 2019). Local governance structures should move beyond symbolic inclusion by adopting gender-responsive planning and budgeting practices. This approach ensures that public resources address the specific needs of women and female-headed households, rather than simply increasing numerical representation (Sharp, 2003).

Legal enforcement of inheritance and property rights is also essential. Securing land access for widows and divorced women would improve household stability and agricultural productivity. In addition, targeted micro-credit and cooperative savings schemes can strengthen women's economic independence and reduce poverty (World Bank, 2020). Finally, engaging traditional and religious leaders is crucial for long-term change. When gender equality is framed as a means of strengthening families and improving economic wellbeing, it becomes more culturally acceptable and sustainable (Kabeer, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality in Gombe Metropolis is a structural development challenge rather than a peripheral social issue. The exclusion of women from education, economic resources, and meaningful governance reduces productivity, increases household vulnerability, and limits sustainable urban growth. The findings of this study demonstrate that when women lack agency, the entire community bears the cost.

Promoting gender equality through education, economic empowerment, inclusive governance, and cultural engagement is therefore essential for sustainable development. Moving from symbolic participation to substantive empowerment can unlock the potential of half of the population, strengthen household resilience, and support inclusive urban growth. In doing so, Gombe Metropolis can serve as a practical model for equitable and sustainable development across Northeastern Nigeria.

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CHAPTER 4
**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: IMPLICATION
OF CULTURAL SILENCE ON MENTAL HEALTH OF
TEENAGE RURAL GIRLS IN NIGERIA**

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INTRODUCTION

World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that female genital mutilation (FGM) is often the fractional or complete non-medical removal of the external female genitals for cultural or religious reasons (Awolola & Ilupej, 2019). Four types of female genital mutilation (FGM) practices include: Type I (clitoridectomy) which entails the total or partial removal of the clitoris and or prepuce; type II encompasses the total or partial removal of labia minora and clitoral glans without the excision of the labia majora; type III (infibulation) entails tightening the vaginal canal by modifying the labia majora and minora and may also include the removal of the clitoral glans; type IV involves any other nonmedical, harmful procedure, such as cauterization, pricking, and scraping (Farouki et al., 2022). The procedure involve in the conduct of female genital mutilation (FGM) is often very stressful, traumatic and painful to say the least as it causes vital injury to genital organ of the girl child (O'Neill & Pallitto, 2021).

Globally, over 230 million girl child and women have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM). With over 144 million incidences, Africa is documented as the epic center for FGM practice. Asia follows with over 80 million, and a further 6 million are in the Middle East. Another 1-2 million are affected in small practicing communities of migrants in the western world (International Data Alliance for Children, 2024). The report of Gbadebo et al (2021) revealed that as at 2021, the prevalence rate of FGM in Nigeria was 20%. Among ethnic and socio-cultural groups, the prevalence was detailed as thus: South West (30%), South East (35%), and North East region (6%) present with the lowest rate in the country. Prevalence of FGM in sates in Nigeria equally varies as 62% women have experienced FGM in Imo state and 51% in Ebonyi State. Most of the women were cut before age 5 (National Population Commission, 2019). This indicates that the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) is quite high among south-eastern states in Nigeria mostly due to their cultural belief (Awolola & Ilupej, 2019).

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**1. CULTURE AS GATEWAY FOR FEMALE GENITAL
MUTILATION (FGM) IN NIGERIA**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) overtime across cultures in Nigeria has been an absurd barbaric cultural practice that violently violate the human and reproductive dignity of the girl child that has remained unchecked. This practice has continually thrived under the cover of traditional superstition, cultural belief and sentiments. The practice of FGN against the girl child in modern civilization can best be termed as human inhumanity to human because it erroneously involves the total or partial cutting off of the vulva or causing other injury to the female genitalia without medical justification. The conduct of FGM on the general wellbeing of the girl child that are victims ignites a sorrowful pain and devastating wave of shock that is practically hard to comprehend (Ofem, 2025).

This resonate the fact that in the light of ancestral injustices practice in Africa for which Nigeria is inclusive, genital violence against the girl child has been in the increase. The unfortunate aspect of this developmental phenomenon is that girls in their infancy and teenage girls 17 years below are predominantly victims of this sad culturally deep-rooted practice that has inflicted generations of pain and suffering (Uwaezuoke, 2025). They are forcefully manhandled by adult women they trust and this sets of women could be their grandmother, mother, aunts, or elderly females within the neighbourhood. Unsterilized crude instruments such as knife, razor blade or broken glasses are often used in cutting the girl child external genitalia and makes her to bleed uncontrollably in most situations and at times it leads to death. During this process, the girl child is not administered any anesthesia. She cries cry and expresses pains that are ignored as signs of becoming a real woman. If the girl child eventually survives her torment, she consequently may experience life threatening challenges rooted in: chronic infections, painful menstrual cycles, pain urinating and even infertility (Uwaezuoke, 2025). The negative impact of the associated shame, physical pain, psycho-socio-emotional trauma and gender-based suppression cannot be overexaggerated. It is a wound in Africa's cultural practice that is continually being refreshed in its daily practice (Uwaezuoke, 2025). Female genital mutilation (FGM) in Nigeria is an aged long detrimental practice reinforced by traditional cultural normative expectations.

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One among every four girls aged 0-17 years in Nigeria has experienced FGM (UNICEF, 2022). Also, United Nations Children Fund (2021) report revealed that over 200 million women and teenage girls in Africa have experience Female genital mutilation. World Health Organisation (2021) report established that over 92 million teenage girls have experience FGM. Gbadebo et al (2021) stated that approximately one quarter of FGM practice across the globe occurs in Nigeria.

Traditional cultural value system has sustained the cotinine occurrence of FGM among ethnic and socio-cultural groups in Nigeria. The practice of FGM in most African societies is conducted as a significant transitional initiation ritual that launches the girl child into womanhood. Someother societies uphold FGM as a dignified practice used to declare a girl child pure and chaste for marriage and a measure used to prevent promiscuity and extramarital exploit among women (Gbadebo et al., 2021). Based on the aforementioned context, the life of a girl child whose genital was not mutilated in the name of circumcision either at infancy, teenage, adolescent or transitional stage into womanhood is often a source of concern for their family. This is because such girl child often encounters challenges getting married. This perceptual view makes families to continually engage in FGM practice. This makes the focus of this book chapter: Female Genital Mutilation: Implication of cultural silence on mental health of teenage rural girls in Nigeria germane.

1.1 Objectives of the Chapter

The objective of this chapter is to X-ray Female Genital Mutilation: Implication of cultural silence on mental health of teenage rural girls in Nigeria and to specifically examine if:

- Female genital mutilation impact on the self-esteem of rural underaged teenage girls in Nigeria?
- Female genital mutilation triggers symptoms of relationship anxiety among rural underaged teenage girls in Nigeria?

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Female Genital Mutilation and Self-Esteem of Victims

Okoiye, Nwoga and Okreke (2015) posit that self-esteem is determined by the kind of evaluation or perceptual view an individual have about him or herself which can be positive or negative. Research documents that ideal changes in an individuals' self-esteem are influenced by that individuals' thought processes that changes continually overtime due to developmental life experience. Self-esteem is associated with individuals' sense of self-worth, value and established identity (Okoiye et al., 2015). For example, teenage girl child experience of FGM practice signals the wake of a conscious new identity of womanhood.

The physical and mental change that occurs due to FGM incidence can put lot of burden and pressure on teenagers to establish an identity that will complement their life experience. However, when they struggle to navigate their unplanned transition attending to new roles and responsibilities of womanhood, they become psychologically disenchanting, emotionally dishearten and express low self-esteem because they are ill-prepared for their experience (Okoiye & Falaye 2010). Fundamentally this development is often characterized by feelings of sadness, anger, withdrawal, helplessness and low self-esteem (Okoiye, Ohizu & Adediran 2011).

Research findings document that women that are FGM victims in diaspora expressed impaired self-esteem, sense of shame feeling different from other women that had not undergone FGM practice (Jordal et al., 2018; Parikh et al., 2018). To overcome challenges of low self-esteem, these sets of women crave for reconstructive clitoral surgery as a measure to make them feel less inferior (Jordal et al., 2018). Johansen (2002) stated that teenage school girls' victims of FGM expressed sense of anger, shock and low self-esteem. Their negative feeling towards themselves affected their dispositions and socialization with peers such as negotiating relationship and engaging in sporting activities. Equally, Ahlberg et al. (2001) report gave a distinct narrative of how Somali school teenage girls in Sweden exercise stigmatizing social pressure behaviour to listen to each other sound of urinating while in the toilets. The essence is to observe the damage FGM caused on the unitary tract.

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Some of the girls felt this kind of surveillance had negative impact on their relationships with girls who had not undergone FGM and it affected their sense of esteem and belonging. This discourse negatively affected the self-esteem of school teenage girls who had undergone some form of FGM practice (Ahlberg et al., 2001). For example, some of the girls explained that when their teacher talked about FGM circumcision, they dramatize and project it as a disease This make students to pity them and think they are different human being (Ahlberg et al., 2001).

Female Genital Mutilation and Relationship Anxiety of Victims

Literature established that relationship anxiety arises when people in relationship or intending relationship continually express worry, feelings of uncertainty, fear, doubt and insecurity regarding acceptability and being appreciated (Okoiye, Adebisi & Nwoga, 2024). Relationship anxiety includes components of social anxiety disorder. More importantly, both conditions can cause a person to experience significant discomfort about rejection (Okoiye et al., 2024). Relationship anxiety impairs an individual ability to add positive value to circles of interpersonal relationship and it is often a gateway for utilizing ego defense mechanism to easy out bottled-up tension and frustration (Okoiye et al., 2024; Powell & Abulhosn, 2022).

FGM transcend the observable pain of virginal disfiguration. It ignites feelings of emotional discontent and can impact on girls' dispositions in initiating social sexual relationship with boys (George Washington University, 2018-2019). Some FGM victims battles with societal stigma and feelings of shame that triggers relationship anxiety (George Washington University, 2018-2019). FGM is linked with psycho-socio relationship problems (e.g. Andro et al., 2014). FGM is associated with negative psychosocial consequences such as social relationship anxiety disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, sexual marital life difficulties etc. (Manuel et al., 2023). Previous studies on FGM reported strong correlation with relationship anxiety, sleep disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc (Behrendt & Moritz, 2005; Mulongo et al., 2014).

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Research Questions

- To what extent does female genital mutilation impact on the self-esteem of rural underaged teenage girls in Nigeria?
- To what extent has female genital mutilation triggers symptoms of relationship anxiety among rural underaged teenage girls in Nigeria?

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive survey research method of quantitative nature using questionnaire for data collection was employed in this study. Self-structured questionnaire was used to gather information on self-esteem and relationship anxiety from rural teenaged girls aged 13 to 17 years who had undergone the FGM from Edo State Nigeria. 2950 teenage girls from fifty rural communities in Edo state were sampled to get objective information concerning the impact of FGM on mental wellbeing of victims focusing on self-esteem and relationship anxiety. These teenage girls were purposively selected from cultural age grade groups that have undergone the ritual right of FGM n the girl child. The age demographic information of the participants is presented in Tables 1, below.

Table 1. Age Distribution of FGM Rural Teenage Girls

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
13	528	17.90
14	582	19.73
15	596	20.20
16	610	20.68
17	634	21.49
Total	2950	100

Procedure of administration: The researcher got the necessary permission from the community heads and age grade of teenage girls used for the study. I explained the essence of the study to them and got their informed consent and thereafter administered the necessary questionnaire two thousand nine hundred and fifty teenage girls from fifty rural communities. After filling, the questionnaires were collected back for analysis.

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Data analysis: Data was analysed using mean, standard deviation and simple percentage to answer the research questions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: To what extent does female genital mutilation impact on the self-esteem of rural underaged teenage girls in Nigeria?

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Result Showing FGM Rural Teenage Girls' Response to the Extent Female Genital Mutilation Impact on Their Self-Esteem

Statement: Despite my female genital mutilation experience ...	Response pattern	13 528	14 582	15 596	16 610	17 634	Total 2950
I feel satisfied with my self	Strongly Agree	28 (0.95%)	34 (1.15%)	21 (0.71%)	45 (1.52%)	21 (0.71%)	5.04
	Agree	18 (0.61%)	22 (0.75%)	10 (0.34%)	33 (1.12%)	10 (0.34%)	3.16
	Don't Know	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Disagree	102 (3.46%)	131 (4.44%)	120 (4.07%)	133 (4.51%)	147 (4.98%)	21.46
	Strongly Disagree	380 (12.88%)	395 (13.39%)	445 (15.08%)	399 (13.53%)	456 (15.46%)	70.34
	Mean, S.D	1.71, .41	1.79, .48	1.71, .41	1.75, .44	1.79, .48	100
I feel am as good as other girls	Strongly Agree	28 (0.95%)	18 (0.61%)	20 (0.68%)	19 (0.64%)	30 (1.02%)	3.90
	Agree	15 (0.51%)	31 (1.05%)	8 (0.27%)	20 (0.68%)	21 (0.71%)	3.22
	Don't Know	10 (0.34%)	7 (0.24%)	10 (0.34%)	15 (0.51%)	13 (0.44%)	1.87

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	Disagree	93 (3.15%)	74 (2.51%)	95 (3.22%)	105 (3.56%)	90 (3.05%)	15.49
	Strongly Disagree	382 (12.95%)	452 (15.32%)	463 (15.69%)	451 (15.29%)	480 (16.27%)	75.52
	Mean, S.D	1.79 .48	1.69, .39	1.75, .44	1.75, .44	1.79, .48	100
I feel I have much to be proud of as a girl	Strongly Agree	15 (0.51%)	21 (0.71%)	27 (0.92%)	20 (0.68%)	20 (0.68%)	3.50
	Agree	10 (0.34%)	16 (0.54%)	19 (0.64%)	15 (0.51%)	12 (0.41%)	2.44
	Don't Know	05 (0.17%)	04 (0.14%)	9 (0.31%)	10 (0.34%)	8 (0.27%)	1.23
	Disagree	77 (2.61%)	95 (3.22%)	91 (3.08%)	93 (3.15%)	96 (3.25%)	15.31
	Strongly Disagree	421 (14.27%)	446 (15.12%)	450 (15.25%)	472 (16%)	498 (16.88%)	77.52
	Mean, S.D	1.84, .54	1.88, .55	1.75. .44	1.69, .39	1.81. .50	100

Information in table 2 revealed the response of rural teenage girls that has got their genital mutilated via FGM practice. Their response indicates that female genital mutilation impaired the self-esteem of rural teenage girls. 70.34% of surveyed rural teenaged girls do not feel satisfied with themselves, 75.52% feel they are not as good as other girls and 77.52% feel that they do not have much to be proud of as a girl. Their negative reservation is caused by the ugly experience of FGM on their mental wellbeing. This indicates that FGM practice has negative impact on self-esteem of teenage rural girls that are victims of FGM practice in Nigeria. This gives credence to the fact that female genital mutilation (FGM) overtime across cultures in Nigeria has been an absurd barbaric cultural practice that violently violate the human and reproductive dignity of the girl child that has remained unchecked.

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This practice has continually thrived under the cover of traditional superstition, cultural belief and sentiments. The practice of FGM against the girl child in modern civilization can best be termed as human inhumanity to human because it erroneously involves the total or partial cutting off of the vulva or causing other injury to the female genitalia without medical justification. The conduct of FGM on the general wellbeing of the girl child that are victims ignites a sorrowful pain and devastating wave of shock that is practically hard to comprehend (Ofem, 2025).

This resonates the fact that in the light of ancestral injustices practice in Africa for which Nigeria is inclusive, genital violence against the girl child has been in the increase. The unfortunate aspect of this developmental phenomenon is that girls in their infancy and teenage girls 17 years below are predominantly victims of this sad culturally deep-rooted practice that has inflicted generations of pain and suffering (Uwaezuoke, 2025). Research findings document that women that are FGM victims in diaspora expressed impaired self-esteem, sense of shame feeling different from other women that had not undergone FGM practice (Jordal et al., 2018; Parikh et al., 2018).

Research Question Two: To what extent has female genital mutilation triggers symptoms of relationship anxiety among rural underaged teenage girls in Nigeria?

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Result Showing FGM Rural Teenage Girls' Response to the Extent Female Genital Mutilation Impact on Their Relationship Anxiety

Statement:	Response pattern	13	14	15	16	17	Total
Due to my female genital mutilation experience ...		528	582	596	610	634	2950
I avoid negotiating relationship with boys	Strongly Agree	377 (12.78%)	413 (14%)	436 (14.78%)	450 (15.25%)	480 (16.27%)	73.08
	Agree	108 (3.66%)	126 (4.27%)	123 (4.16%)	120 (4.07%)	110 (3.73%)	19.89
	Don't Know	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00

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	Disagree	17 (0.58%)	10 (0.34%)	17 (0.58%)	10 (0.34%)	30 (1.02%)	2.86
	Strongly Disagree	26 (0.88%)	33 (1.12%)	20 (0.68%)	30 (1.02%)	14 (0.47%)	4.17
	Mean, S.D	1.63, .35	1.69, .39	1.75, .44	1.70, .40	1.70, .40	100
I often worry that my boyfriend will leave me, even if there's no clear reason.	Strongly Agree	404 (13.69%)	463 (15.70%)	488 (16.54%)	445 (15.08%)	463 (15.69%)	76.70
	Agree	104 (3.53%)	96 (3.25%)	100 (3.39%)	125 (4.24%)	141 (4.78%)	19.19
	Don't Know	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Disagree	10 (0.34%)	20 (0.68%)	2 (0.07%)	18 (0.61%)	20 (0.68%)	2.38
	Strongly Disagree	10 (0.34%)	3 (0.10%)	6 (0.20%)	22 (0.75%)	10 (0.34%)	1.73
	Mean, S.D	1.75, .44	1.63, .35	1.69, .39	1.81, .50	1.69, .39	100
I find it difficult to express my needs or feelings to my boyfriend for fear of rejection.	Strongly Agree	414 (14.03%)	465 (15.76%)	471 (15.96%)	483 (16.37%)	498 (16.88%)	79
	Agree	94 (3.19%)	95 (3.22%)	104 (3.53%)	107 (3.63%)	112 (3.79%)	17.36
	Don't Know	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00
	Disagree	8 (0.27%)	12 (0.41%)	10 (0.34%)	10 (0.34%)	12 (0.41%)	1.77
	Strongly Disagree	12 (0.41%)	10 (0.34%)	11 (0.37%)	10 (0.34%)	12 (0.41%)	1.87
	Mean, S.D	1.89, .60	1.82, .57	1.75, .44	1.63, .35	1.69, .39	100

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The result in table 3 shows that female genital mutilation negatively triggers relationship anxiety among rural underaged teenage girls that are victims of FGM practice in Nigeria. For example, among 2950 teenage girls surveyed, 73.08% indicated that they ‘‘I avoid negotiating relationship with boys’’ 76.70% ‘‘I often worry that my boyfriend will leave me, even if there’s no clear reason’’ and 79% expressed thus ‘‘I find it difficult to express my needs or feelings to my boyfriend for fear of rejection’’. This implies that FGM practice has compounding negative effect on the relationship anxiety of victims. This development indicates that FGM transcend the observable pain of virginal disfiguration. It ignites feelings of emotional discontent and can impact on girls’ dispositions in initiating social sexual relationship with boys (George Washington University, 2018-2019). Some FGM victims battles with societal stigma and feelings of shame that triggers relationship anxiety (George Washington University, 2018-2019). FGM is linked with psycho-socio relationship problems (e.g. Andro et al., 2014). FGM is associated with negative psychosocial consequences such as social relationship anxiety disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, sexual marital life difficulties etc. (Manuel et al., 2023). Previous studies on FGM reported strong correlation with relationship anxiety, sleep disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc (Behrendt & Moritz, 2005; Mulongo et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

The occurrence of FGM practice is still prevalent as revealed with the outcome of this study. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a phenomenon that impairs the general wellbeing of victims and it constitutes a grave violation of the human rights of girls and women. The culture of silence has and would continually serve as an enabler for FGM practice in Nigeria. This is because the enabling determinants are deeply rooted in cultural practices and norms underlying unequal power relations that govern sexual behaviour. This practice has deep negative implications for the general wellbeing of teenage girls. Therefore, government, its agencies and significant stakeholders need to work together in unison to out an end to this barbaric cultural practice that has negatively impacted the developmental life experience of lots of girls and women alike.

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