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## Growing Up as Boys and Girls

Being a boy or a girl is an important part of one's identity. Society teaches us what kinds of behaviour are acceptable for boys and girls, and what they can or cannot do. These ideas are often assumed to be the same everywhere, but different societies view boys and girls differently. This chapter explores how roles assigned to boys and girls prepare them for their future roles as men and women, and how most societies value men and women differently. Typically, the roles and work of women are valued less than those of men. We will also examine how inequalities between men and women emerge, especially in the area of work.

## Growing Up in Samoa in the 1920s

The Samoan Islands, located in the southern Pacific Ocean, had a unique way of growing up in the 1920s. Children did not attend formal schools but learned important skills from older children and adults. Fishing was a key activity, and young people learned to undertake long fishing expeditions at different stages of childhood.

As soon as babies could walk, older children, sometimes as young as five, took responsibility for looking after younger siblings. Both boys and girls shared this task. By about nine years old, boys joined older boys in outdoor jobs like fishing and planting coconuts. Girls continued to look after small children and run errands until their teenage years. After about fourteen, girls gained more freedom, joining fishing trips,

working in plantations, and learning crafts like basket weaving. Cooking was done in special cooking-houses where boys did most of the work and girls helped with preparations.

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*A Class VII Samoan child  
in his school uniform.*

**In what ways do the experiences**

of Samoan children and teenagers differ from your own experiences of growing up? Is there anything in this experience that you wish was part of your growing up?

Reflection Questions:

How might the experiences of Samoan children and teenagers differ from your own childhood?

**Answer:** Samoan children learned skills through family and community rather than formal schooling. Their roles were closely tied to community needs like fishing and household work, which may differ from more school-focused childhoods elsewhere.

What aspects of Samoan childhood would you like to experience?

**Answer:** Answers may vary; some may appreciate the close family involvement and learning practical skills early in life.

## Growing Up Male in Madhya Pradesh in the 1960s

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In a small town in Madhya Pradesh during the 1960s, boys and girls attended separate schools. Girls' schools had central courtyards for safe play, while boys' schools had open playgrounds. After school, boys often idled or played in the streets, while girls walked purposefully home in groups, likely for safety and to avoid teasing or attacks.

This example shows that childhood experiences vary widely and that societies make clear distinctions between boys and girls from a young age. These distinctions are reinforced through different toys, clothing, games, and expected behaviours, which prepare children for specific adult roles. This affects education choices and career opportunities later in life.



*Why do girls like to go to school together in groups?*

**Why do girls like to go to school together in groups?**

**Answer:** Girls often walk in groups for safety, companionship, encouragement, and enjoyment. Walking together helps build social bonds and provides emotional support.

## **Valuing Housework**

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Housework and care-giving tasks, such as looking after family members, are mainly done by women worldwide. However, this work is often not recognized as real work because it is unpaid and assumed to

come naturally to women. Society tends to devalue this work.

Many domestic workers, mostly women, perform household tasks like cleaning, cooking, and caring for children or the elderly. Despite their hard work, they often receive low wages and little respect. For example, Melani, a domestic worker in Delhi, described long working hours, poor treatment, and hunger despite her efforts.



*Melani with her daughter.*

**Were Harmeet and Shonali correct in saying that Harmeet's mother did not work?**

**Answer:** No, they were incorrect. Housework and caregiving are real work that require effort and time, even if unpaid and done at home.

**What would happen if those who do housework went on strike for a day?**

**Answer:** The household would face difficulties managing daily tasks, showing how essential and demanding housework is.

## Why do men and boys generally not do housework? Should they?

**Answer:** Traditionally, housework is seen as women's responsibility due to social norms. However, men and boys should share housework to promote equality and reduce women's burden.

Housework involves physically demanding tasks like fetching water, carrying firewood, washing clothes, and cooking. Women often spend more total time working (paid and unpaid) than men, leading to a double burden.

State	Women Paid (hours/week)	Women Unpaid (hours/week)	Women Total (hours/week)	Men Paid (hours/week)	Men Unpaid (hours/week)	Men Total (hours/week)
Haryana	23	30	53	38	2	40
Tamil Nadu	19	35	54	40	4	44

## What are the total number of work hours spent by women in Haryana and Tamil Nadu each week?

**Answer:** Women in Haryana work 53 hours per week, and women in Tamil Nadu work 54 hours per week, combining paid and unpaid work.

## How does this compare with the total number of work hours spent by men?

**Answer:** Men work fewer total hours: 40 hours in Haryana and 44 hours in Tamil Nadu, mainly because they spend less time on unpaid housework.

## Women's Work and Equality

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The low value attached to women's household and caregiving work is part of a larger system of inequality between men and women. The Indian Constitution promotes equality and prohibits discrimination based on sex. However, inequality persists, and the government takes steps to address it.

For example, the government has established anganwadi centres to provide childcare and early education in villages, helping women to work outside the home and enabling more girls to attend school. Laws require

organizations with more than 30 women employees to provide crèche facilities, supporting working mothers.



*Children at an Anganwadi centre in a village in Madhya Pradesh.*

## Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

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Gender equality is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 05). It aims to achieve equal rights, opportunities, and empowerment for all women and girls. Gender equality is essential for creating fair and just societies and for sustainable development where everyone can thrive.



## Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

[www.in.undp.org](http://www.in.undp.org)

### Identity, Rights, and Dignity

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A poster using traditional Indian art depicts themes of identity, oppression, work, struggle, and education. It asks the question "Who am I?" encouraging reflection on personal identity and rights. The poster urges people not to be apathetic but to stand up for their rights and dignity through education and awareness.

What do you think this poster is trying to say?



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हन कही माजूह  
मेनी अबदेन्नी  
ओर बही नमव  
कोव नी

वह तुम्हारी उपलब्धि  
जिनमें मेरा बही वह मात्र  
औरत को चाहिए अपना अधिकार



महिला जागरण केंद्र, पंचवटी नगर, रावेन्द्र नगर पटना-800 016

अखिल भारतीय महिला सम्मेलन संस्था, पञ्चवटी, कर्णाली

पता: पञ्चवटी, पटना-800 016

## Recognition of Women's Domestic Labour

A poster by a women's group in Bengal shows a woman with multiple hands holding household and labor-related items, symbolizing the many roles women play. The poster demands payment for housework, highlighting the economic value of unpaid domestic labor and advocating for women's rights and gender equality.

*This poster was created by a women's group in Bengal. Can you write an interesting slogan for the poster?*



## Glossary

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**Identity:** A sense of self-awareness of who one is. A person can have multiple identities, such as being a girl, a sister, and a musician.

**Double-burden:** The situation where women perform both paid work outside the home and unpaid housework inside the home.

**Care-giving:** Tasks related to looking after and nurturing others, including physical and emotional support.

**De-valued:** When someone's work or effort is not given due recognition or respect.

## Solved Examples

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### Example 1:

**Question:** Why is housework often not considered real work?

**Answer:** Housework is unpaid and done within the home, so society often overlooks its value. It is assumed to come naturally to women and does not require payment, leading to its devaluation.

### Example 2:

**Question:** How do anganwadi centres help promote gender equality?

**Answer:** Anganwadi centres provide childcare and early education, enabling women to work outside the home and allowing more girls to attend school, thus supporting gender equality.

## Practice Set

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## Easy

- What are some ways society teaches boys and girls to behave differently?
- Why do girls often walk to school in groups?

## Moderate

- Explain the concept of the double burden of women's work.
- Describe the role of anganwadi centres in supporting working women.

## Challenging

- Discuss why housework is devalued and suggest ways to change this perception.
- Analyze how gender roles assigned in childhood affect career choices later in life.

## Answer Key

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### Easy

- Society teaches different behaviours through toys, clothing, games, and expectations.
- Girls walk in groups for safety, companionship, and support.

### Moderate

- The double burden refers to women doing both paid work and unpaid housework.
- Anganwadi centres provide childcare and education, helping women work outside the home.

### Challenging

- Housework is devalued because it is unpaid and seen as natural for women; awareness and policy changes can help.
- Gender roles limit subjects studied and careers chosen by reinforcing stereotypes from childhood.

## Quick Reference

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- **Identity:** How we see ourselves as boys or girls.
- **Gender Roles:** Socially assigned tasks and behaviours for males and females.
- **Double Burden:** Women's combined paid and unpaid work.
- **Anganwadi Centres:** Government childcare and early education centres.
- **Gender Equality:** Equal rights and opportunities for all genders.

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