

The PERSPECTIVE of CARING

A Q&A on caring,
the vital human
relationship
that ensures survival
and well-being,
the international petition
to get a living wage
for this work,
the origins of this demand
and who supports it.

**Why Mothers
and
All Carers
Should Get
a Living Wage
for their
Caring Work**

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INVEST IN CARING,
NOT KILLING

Global
Women's Strike



1. What is the perspective of caring?

Caring is basic to human relationships. It ensures survival and well-being, especially of children, and ill, disabled and elderly people. It protects us in

the home and outside, in the city and the countryside, in peace and in war. Caring is hard and skilled work, physically and emotionally. There is no community without it. The perspective of caring puts life, not market forces, at the centre of everything society does.

Caring for others is accomplished by a dazzling array of skills in an endless variety of circumstances. As well as cooking, shopping, cleaning and laundering, planting, tending and harvesting for others, women comfort and guide, nurse and teach, arrange and advise, discipline and encourage, fight for and pacify. Taxing and exhausting under any circumstances, this service work, this emotional housework, is done both outside and inside the home ... And we women are the first to defend and protect those in our care. It is usually women – mothers, wives, partners, sisters, daughters, grannies and aunts – who are the driving force of justice campaigns, whether or not we are prominent or even visible in them.

Selma James, *The Global Kitchen*, 1985
in *Sex, Race and Class – The Perspective of Winning*, 2012

2. Who does caring work?

Women are the primary carers everywhere in the world. In the non-industrial world, growing food is integral to caring work. Women grow most of the world's food and are the majority of subsistence farmers.

Women do 1 to 3 hours a day more housework than men; 2 to 10 times more caring (for children, elderly, and the sick).¹ In the UK, women are 90% of primary carers. In Malawi, 93% of women's agricultural work is unpaid.

Men and children, especially girls, also do caring work. Older girls raise the younger ones, fetch water and fuel, cook ... In England and Wales, 1/4 million children and 2m men provide some unpaid care (UK Census 2011).

3. Why campaign for a living wage for mothers and all carers?

¹ UN Women, Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#sthash.Oy60wa8w.dpuf>

To ensure that the needs of carers, starting with mothers, and all who need care, are prioritised. We want the economy to be at the service of human beings, not human beings at the service of the economy. To pay mothers and all carers a living wage would redirect economic and social policies towards survival, health and well-being – for every individual and for the planet which sustains us all.

Caring is a fundamental contribution to society, and women do most of it. This should be a source of social and economic power for carers, not of impoverishment, dependence and overwork. If all carers (regardless of gender) were paid a living wage for this work, caring would be valued and carers would have more power to shape policies – on economic growth, the budget, the length of the working day, technology, war ...

While paid work is assigned a monetary value and features in national [accounts] such as GDP, unpaid work remains largely unmeasured ... and consequently invisible in discussions of economic policy. UNDP 2015

4. Where does this demand come from?

A century ago, UK suffragette and member of parliament **ELEANOR RATHBONE** campaigned for a wage for mothers.



Rathbone won Family Allowance for mothers in 1945.

Nothing can justify the subordination of one group of producers – the mothers – to the rest, and their deprivation of all share of their own in the wealth of a community which depends on them for its very existence. Eleanor Rathbone, *The Disinherited Family*, 1924



Feminist author **VIRGINIA WOOLF** called for:

A living wage to be paid by the State legally to the mothers.
Three Guineas, 1938

In 1972 **SELMA JAMES**, co-author of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, launched the domestic labour debate, and formed the Wages for

Housework Campaign that now co-ordinates the Global Women's Strike.



Sex, Race and Class – The Perspective of Winning, 1952-2011

Women produce and reproduce the whole labour force, the whole human race.

Nigerian women losing rural income after migrating to the city demanded wages for housework. (Ester Boserup)



US Black mothers called for a Guaranteed Adequate Income. **JOHNNIE TILLMON** (above left), Chair of the National Welfare Rights Organization, wrote:

If I were president, I would ... go a long way toward liberating every woman. I'd just issue a proclamation that 'women's' work is real work. I'd start paying women a living wage for doing the work we are already doing – childraising and

house-keeping.
Welfare is a women's issue, 1972

The 1977 **US Conference on Women:**

The elimination of poverty must be a priority for all those working for equal rights for women ... just as with other workers, homemakers receiving [welfare] payments should be afforded the dignity of having that payment called a wage, not welfare. Black Women for Wages for Housework worked with welfare mothers to win this.

The **UN Decade for Women (1975-85)** agreed to include the value of unremunerated work in the home, on the land and in the community in national accounts.

Article 88 of Venezuela's 1999 constitution recognises work in the home as productive, entitling housewives to social security and pensions.

UK psychologist **Oliver James:**

We should pay the average annual wage to one or other parent to look after their children full time or to share it ... [Raising] the status of being a mother would mean that we start valuing the things that really matter, which is looking after our children. *Affluenza, 2007*

5. What do mothers want?

In many parts of the world mothers are now told that we should go back to work full-time as soon as possible after giving birth. But many complain

about having to go out to earn just enough to pay for someone else (usually another low-waged woman) to take care of their children. Most mothers would spend more time with their children if they could afford to.

- A UK Mumsnet survey found that 88% of mothers with young children in a full-time job would rather work part-time or be full-time carers.²
- A US survey of 2,127 women with children under the age of 18, found that given the choice only 9% wanted to work full-time; 65% part-time; and 30% to stay at home.³
- US: 74% of women (aged 25-54) were in employment in 1999; 69% today. “12 weeks of maternity leave was too short. ‘I didn’t want to leave [my daughter] in day care.’”⁴
- Mothers in the US are campaigning against welfare “reform” which forces them to leave infants as young as six weeks old to go out to work.⁵
- Sweden: 71% of women aged 30-49 and 73% of parents of children under two want the option to stay home until their children are four (2006).⁶ 80% of Swedish women are in waged work, the highest rate in the world; 2/3 of people on sick pay are women.⁷
- The Netherlands scores highly on children’s and adults’ happiness: 68% of women work part-time (about 25 hours a week), more than in any other OECD country!⁸

6. Why aren’t mothers listened to?

The expectation that women go out to work has hidden this information and thwarted our demands. A “successful” woman is one who is devoted to her career, not one who wants to spend more time with her children or others she cares for. The lack of wages for caring discourages women and men

² <http://www.netmums.com/home/netmums-campaigns/the-great-work-debate>

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/12/what-mothers-really-want- n_3744110.html

⁴ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/upshot/us-employment-women-not-working.html?_r=0

⁵ Welfare Warriors, Global Women’s Strike and Every Mother Is a Working Mother Network hold Stop the War on the Poor protests and campaign for legislation to reinstate welfare rights.

⁶ Sifo poll 18-20 April 2006

⁷ Prof. Helene Sandmark, Woman’s Hour, BBC Radio 4, 10 Nov 2015; SCB (Statistiska Centralbyrån – Central Statistical Bureau, Sweden) 2011

⁸ Unicef survey: <http://www.findingdutchland.com/happiest-kids-in-the-world/> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the governments of 34 democracies with market economies working with each other.

from refusing jobs they don't want – either they can't afford to or they will be disrespected for their choice.

When in 2015 Nadiya Jamir Hussain won the Great British Bake Off to the delight of 14m viewers, she said she was “proud to represent stay-at-home mums”. She spoke about the “negativity” she had to face in an age when mothers are expected to prove their worth by going out to work: “As a mum that was quite tough but that was a choice that I made ... I've had such a good time with my children.”⁹

7. Didn't women struggle to go out to work?

Because women get pregnant and give birth, we have been expected to do society's caring work. For centuries women were treated as men's property, and so were our children. We had to stay at home with no money of our own and take care of the family. Our rebellion won important changes in many places: inheritance and equity laws, child custody, paid maternity leave, child benefits, subsidised childcare, the criminalisation of domestic violence and rape in marriage, the right to pursue any job or profession previously open only to men ... though we haven't won pay equity yet.

But financial recognition for caring work still eludes us. This has been our major weakness. As a result, women everywhere continue to be the poorer sex and single mother families are the poorest families.

In rural areas, land grabs and cash crops have decimated subsistence farming, forcing many women to migrate to the city.

In the city, austerity has targeted the jobs, benefits and services that women rely on (79% in the UK); many mothers are now on zero-hour contracts,¹⁰ doing two or three part-time jobs, doing sex work, or depending on food banks for family survival.

We are told we must go out to earn a living and put our children in childcare. In some places, we cannot get a mortgage unless both mother and father are employed – one wage is no longer enough. Rushing from one crisis to another, we are deprived of time together. We are segregated and isolated by generation, and many suffer from a new loneliness. We must have the economic power to determine how we want to live.

⁹ Award-winning British TV baking competition.

¹⁰ Jobs where employers have no obligation to guarantee any hours of work and therefore any pay.

8. Would wages for caring institutionalise us in the home?

It is not our caring work but our lack of money that has kept us in the home. We couldn't afford to leave. Expectations have changed and many women (often the majority) now have jobs. But we don't want to be stuck in a job either. We want flexibility, not segregation. We may want to take time off while the children are small, to have a part-time job, or a job that allows us to have our children with us, without being impoverished.

Too often mothers are forced to choose between caring on our own, which is isolating and may lead to depression, or putting our children in childcare for hours on end, depriving us of each other, and filling us with guilt and anxiety.

Paying mothers and other carers a living wage would raise the status of our work and our possibilities. We would no longer be subordinate to anyone; we could shape the caring we do based on what's best for us and those we care for, not what suits the job market or other people's schedules. We could demand support and services.

9. All workers must be paid a living wage. Why not mothers?

We all agree that caring is fundamental, that women do most of it, and that men should do more. We also agree that all workers should get a living wage. Since caring is vital, why are those who do most of it deprived of the time, money and resources we need? Why are women told that to be liberated we must prioritise earning over caring? How can our liberation be at the cost of the neglect of our loved ones?

In the class society we live in, survival work is demeaned. Not only caring but growing food and essential services are unpaid or poorly paid – look at small farmers, health workers, domestic and homecare workers, cooks, cleaners, rubbish collectors ... It's time we changed all that.

10. Won't paying mothers monetise our relationships?

In some countries women get child benefit, carers allowance and paid maternity leave. These have not undermined our relationship with our children or others we care for. Why should a living wage harm our relationships? Do we not feel better about ourselves and each other when

our work is valued rather than taken for granted, and when we can pay people to help us?

11. Would a wage encourage mothers to breastfeed?

Evidence from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and others agrees that breast milk is the best food for infants. They recommend at least six months exclusive breastfeeding.¹¹

The drive to get women out to work has promoted formula as “liberating”, and the baby milk industry has used this to push their product. They give free samples, and once the breast milk supply dries up mothers have no choice but to use formula. In countries where women have little access to clean water and no money, promoting formula has been genocidal. Everywhere it has undermined health – children’s and mothers’ – and cost lives.

Breastfed children are six times more likely to survive in the early months than non-breastfed children.

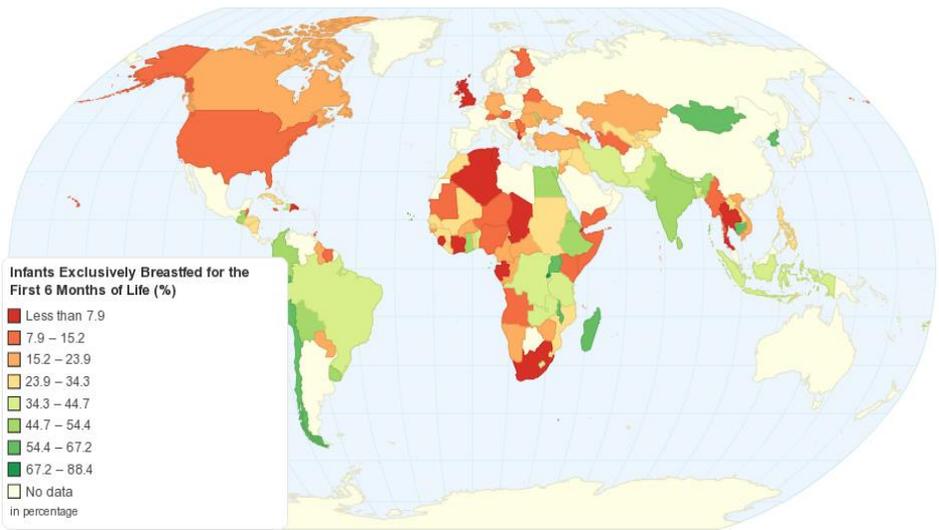
An exclusively breastfed child is 14 times less likely to die in the first six months.¹²

The natural childbirth movement has fought against the medicalisation of birth and for breastfeeding. Mothers are told that breast is best but rarely given the support they need to breastfeed successfully. Many women no longer live with or near their extended family, and are cut off from knowledge previously passed on from generation to generation. In the West new mothers often know little about breastfeeding and are faced with engorged breasts, cracked nipples and crying infants. Instead of being pressurised, mothers should get help to deal with these painful and frightening problems.

Infants exclusively breastfed for 6 months

¹¹ <http://chartsbin.com/view/2555>

¹² http://www.unicef.org/nutrition/index_24824.html



Countries that help new mothers have a 70% to 90% success in breastfeeding – from Norway to Peru, Sri Lanka and Rwanda. Women who have to go out to work find it harder to carry on breastfeeding. Wages for caring would enable mothers to wean their babies when they are ready.

12. What about maternity and paternity leave?

Maternity leave is crucial for breastfeeding and nurturing. To separate children from their primary carer when they are at their most vulnerable, still breastfeeding and before they can walk and talk, is traumatic and can affect a child's development.

To achieve ... basic emotional literacy, babies need to be with people they are attached to well beyond nine months ... people who are safe and familiar ... and, above all, love them. The idea that their main caregiver should be forced by economic necessity to take paid employment – or encouraged to let someone else manage their baby's emotional development – is ludicrous.¹³

In the US, since 1996 welfare “reform”, mothers are forced to leave infants as young as six weeks old for “workfare” (work for your benefits) or low paid dead-end jobs. The UK is following the US model.

Sweden has the longest paid maternity leave – 13 months at 80% of earnings which can be extended to 16 months for a single mother. In Norway, new mothers can take up to 36 weeks off work with 100% of their

¹³ Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain*, 2004

pay, or 46 weeks with 80% pay. Maternity leave should be paid for as a wage to the mother and extended until children start school. It should include free healthcare and count towards career progression and pension. What can be more important than giving infants the best start in life and valuing the exhausting work of new mothers?

In Sweden, the father or partner, gets two months “reserved” leave. This encourages the early involvement of fathers/partners in the care of children. Once the baby stops breastfeeding, the other carer (of whatever gender) can become the primary carer if that’s what the family wants.

In Norway after a year’s leave, mothers or fathers can put their children in subsidised childcare or get money from the state to care for their children at home until they are two. Not enough but a good beginning.

UK maternity leave is 39 weeks (6 weeks at 90% of average earnings, the rest at £140 a week). The US is the only rich country with no federal paid maternity leave policy and no universal child or family allowance.

13. Shouldn’t men share childcare 50 / 50?

Of course men should share; we should all be carers. But sharing is no reason why caring work should not be paid for. And what “equality” are we aiming for? Should we hide that it is the mother who carries the baby for nine months, gives birth, breastfeeds, and is most needed and involved in the early years? This biological process is also a social contribution by women which must be respected and protected. Hiding it has demeaned it, reducing the importance of human life and what women are uniquely contributing to it. So instead of demanding a shorter working day based on our needs as carers, we have had to squeeze caring in after other work demands are met. This market-led feminism assumes we should abandon caring, “prove our worth” by doing what men do, and be available 24/7 so we can compete with them (and with other women) for the top jobs. It does not free our time or men’s time so we can all do more caring and be mutually supportive.

And who are single mothers, who are increasing in number, to share with?

About 25% of families in US and UK are headed by single parents, mostly mothers. They are twice as likely to live in poverty. Most are employed.¹⁴

43% of children in South Africa, 33% in Colombia, 12% in Japan, 10% in The Philippines and 9% in India live in single-parent families.¹⁵

In Thailand 80% of sex workers are single mums. (Empower)

Valuing caring would encourage all to care, whether they have children or not, so we can have a society of carers where caring is everyone's priority.

In the US, parents find caring for their children more exhausting but more meaningful than the work they do for pay. Mothers' time in unpaid work (childcare and housework) is longer than fathers' (31 hours per week vs. 17 hours). Fathers have 3 hours per week more leisure time. Mothers feel more exhausted.¹⁶

14. What about people who are ill, disabled or elderly?

We all need caring relationships, and we all need one on one care at some point or other. In many places, the extended family has been replaced by institutions where care workers (mainly women) are discouraged from caring by understaffing, productivity targets, low pay and punishing shifts. In the UK, scandal after scandal has exposed institutional indifference, negligence, cruelty and even murder.

In the UK, at least one million frail and disabled pensioners, the majority women, have no services visiting them.¹⁷

In the US, 72% of women with disabilities live below the poverty line.

A living wage for carers would not deny the right of people with disabilities and older people to an independent income and personal assistance of our

¹⁴ <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/breadwinner-moms/>;
<http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/content/365/Statistics>

¹⁵ <http://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2014/articles/world-family-indicators/family-structure>

¹⁶ <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/10/08/parents-time-with-kids-more-rewarding-than-paid-work-and-more-exhausting/>

¹⁷ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/home-and-care/care-in-crisis/>

choice. Right now, resources for independent living in the community are cut back or non-existent.

Many older and disabled people are also carers for loved ones.

The perspective of caring would make central to society the relationship between the person who needs the care and the person who provides it – affording both of us dignity and respect.

15. How much is caring valued at?

Estimates of the value of caring work vary depending on how the work is counted and if it includes multi-tasking, which women are famous for.

In the UK, 6.8m people provide unpaid care for disabled, seriously-ill or older loved ones, saving the state £132 billion a year.¹⁸

Interflora estimated that the average UK mum works 119 hours a week; if paid she would earn £172,000 extra a year.²¹

US women's unpaid care work is worth \$1.5 trillion a year.²²

UK unpaid childcare was valued at £343 billion.¹⁹

Legal & General values the domestic work a mum does at £29,535 a year.²⁰

The value of unwaged family caregiving for adults is \$470 billion a year.²³

The estimated replacement value of housework is \$96,261 a year per household.²⁴

16. Where would the money for a living wage come from?

We are told that there is no money for care, that people living longer is a crisis, that free healthcare and education are unaffordable, that immigrants and refugees must be kept out because they cost too much. Yet there is

¹⁸ <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/press-releases/unpaid-carers-save-the-uk-132-billion-a-year-the-cost-of-a-second-nhs>

¹⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11234123/Household-chores-to-be-given-economic-value.html>

²⁰ <http://www.legalandgeneral.com/advisercentre/protection/our-solutions/personal-protection/value-of-a-parent/>

²¹ *The Independent*, Mother's Day 2015: mothers deserve £172,000 a year, 15 March 2015.

²² McKinsey Global Institute Report 2015

²³ AARP 2015

²⁴ <http://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/0112/how-much-is-a-homemaker-worth.aspx>

money for other things: to cut corporation taxes and the taxes of the 1%, to wage war, to finance privatisation ...

In 1945 after World War II Britain was broke, yet it created a brilliant welfare state to take care of people “from the cradle to the grave” – free healthcare, public housing, state pensions, family allowances, single mother benefits and others. It’s all about priorities.

The world spends about \$2 trillion a year on wars.
\$30 billion a year would end starvation and hunger,
\$11 billion would provide clean water worldwide.²⁵

Even countries where people live on very low incomes have introduced benefits for mothers, children and older people, and some free healthcare when they decided to prioritise people. In rural areas mothers and other carers may prefer to be paid with land and other resources – it all depends on the situation and what women are struggling for.

17. Who cares when women go out to work or can’t cope?

Older children, grannies or other family members. Kinship carers are raising grandchildren with little recognition or support: while a foster parent in the UK may get more than £1,000 a week, most kinship carers get nothing. The Scottish National Kinship Care Alliance is fighting to end discrimination against kinship children and their carers. When everyone is out at work, an industry has grown to replace caring previously provided at home – nurseries, care homes, ready meals ...

The top professional women are dependent on an army of low paid women, often immigrant, to do caring work for them. These “golden skirts” are about 13% of women of working age in the UK. Their rise has not improved the lot of the other 87%.²⁶ While the precise figure may vary from country to country, there are now “golden skirts” almost everywhere.

18. Shouldn’t caring be the responsibility of the state?

The state should fund caring without taking over care. State planners and institutions are not benign – they have priorities other than individual needs. They assume caring can be planned in the same way as the production of things. But people are not things. Whether state-run or

²⁵ <http://worldbeyondwar.org/need-2-trillionyear-things-detail/>

²⁶ Alison Wolf, *Working Girls*, 2006, *The XX Factor*, 2013.

privatised, the care industry is based on either tight budgets or profit-making, and those who work in it (usually women) are low paid and exploited. Carers (women and men) and the people who need care should decide together how that care is to be organised: what time, what resources, what community facilities, what individual support we both need.

19. Would a living wage for caring advance pay equity?

The main obstacles to pay equity are: 1) most women are employed in the caring and service industries; 2) these industries are treated as an extension of unwaged caring in the home and are low paid; 3) the skills involved in caring are unvalued or undervalued; 4) more women than men have part-time jobs, especially when our children are young or disabled, or we are caring for elderly relatives; 5) subsistence agriculture is unwaged.

In most countries women earn on average 60 to 75% of men's wages.²⁷

In South Asia, agriculture, primarily informal, accounts for 62% of women's employment & 42% of men's.

Of 53m domestic workers worldwide, 83% are women.

In the US, 41% of all women-headed families with children live in poverty.

Women and children are 75% of people living below the poverty line in the US.

Lifetime earnings vary greatly according to class.

In UK, 13% of women who are professionals, managers or employers can expect earnings of 88% of husbands; 57% for women with middle-level qualifications; and 34% for women with no formal qualifications.²⁸

Most women, especially single mothers, are so desperate to earn an income that we are in no position to refuse low pay and exploitation. Paying mothers and other carers a living wage would raise the value placed on caring for human life and on our skills as carers. It would raise our bargaining power when we go out to work. This would have a huge impact on women's income. Instead we are told that caring for human beings will always be financially unrewarding and that we should get into more lucrative (male dominated) industries.

²⁷ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

²⁸ Alison Wolf, *Working Girls*

20. Would a living wage for caring benefit pensions?

Women pay for a lifetime of unwaged caring for families and communities with greater poverty and overwork as we grow older. Older women are often on the lowest incomes. Many over 50 work part-time so they can care for grandchildren, elderly parents or both. Women never retire, we just tire, as caring never stops.

UK women over 50 earn under £10,000 a year.²⁹

Women are the majority of pensioners living in poverty.³⁰

Women's average pensions are only 62% of men's. Men used to retire at 65 and women at 60. A later official retirement age of 68 for everyone – equalising women to men – began to be introduced in 2007. Equalising takes no account of all the years of caring work women have done and often continue to do, and increases older women's poverty and overwork. The UK government took £30 billion from women by speeding up the "equalising", hardly informing those to be affected.

A living wage from the start of our caring lives, would entitle us to higher pensions that take account of *all* our work.

21. Would a living wage protect women from violence?

Yes! Women's financial dependence on men is at the core of our vulnerability to violence, and the mothers of young children are most at risk. We are more dependent at that time and less available to men as we concentrate on the needs of the newborn.

In the West, austerity measures have targeted women, depriving us of the resources we need to escape violent relationships. As a result of cuts to legal aid and "*the reduced economic independence of women and the impact of the cuts to services on which women disproportionately depend*", violence, especially domestic violence, has gone up.³¹

Women Against Rape (UK) points to sexist family courts using domestic violence to take children away from women – blaming mothers for not protecting children and prioritising violent fathers' contact with them! Many mothers are not reporting violence for fear of losing our children.

²⁹ Age Immaterial: Women over 50 in the workplace, TUC 2014

³⁰ Fawcett Society, 8 March 2013

³¹ The research was led by Sylvia Walby, Unesco chair in gender research and a professor of sociology at Lancaster University. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/13/hidden-rise-violent-crime-growth-violence-against-women>

A massive movement of mothers fighting to keep their children has begun to win changes ... Child protection must begin with support and resources for the child's main carer – usually the mother. Instead, mothers are having their benefits capped and money is being poured into professional agencies which concentrate on targets and bonuses – a recipe for state child abuse.³²

To end women's vulnerability, WAR has been campaigning for financial independence and supports a living wage for mothers.

To escape uncaring or violent partners, many mothers opt to raise children on their own or with other women.

22. What about a basic income?

A basic income establishes that human beings have the right to the money we need to survive whether we have a paid job or not. This is crucial and must be supported.

But a basic income does not challenge the inequitable relationship between women and men – i.e. who does what work and who gets what wages for it. It is sexist to hide that women worldwide are doing the vast majority of caring work for children and for everyone else. Just because we want men to do more of it, is no reason to hide the exploitation we face as unwaged carers. Hiding it puts us in a weaker position socially, politically and economically, and assumes that we will carry on doing this work without wages.

Lack of recognition of women's caring work has also made it easier for governments, starting with the US and UK, to attack the welfare payments of mothers, hugely increasing women's and children's poverty. Since the US 1996 welfare "reform", welfare spending is up but the number of families receiving it is down – 82 % of poor families in 1979, 25% in 2014. Instead of funding mothers as they used to, agencies are funded to take children from mothers. Benefits are now 50% below the poverty line. Some governments are considering paying "citizens" a basic income.³³

³² Lisa Longstaff, Women Against Rape, *Guardian*, 28 January 2014

³³ Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland are discussing paying about 800 Euros (\$875) a month to every "citizen" with no means testing and no requirement to work. Any income earned is on top. This would replace benefits. The Green Party suggests it would help to deal with an insecure job market, allow you to study, look for a job you like, spend more time with your children ...



This is in response to automation – as machines replace jobs, fewer workers are needed, and capital prefers robots which don't strike. But if millions of people lose their jobs and are left without an income, we are not likely to quietly starve. A basic income generally refers to people in high income countries. What about the rest of the world? What about those of us who are immigrants, are we to be considered "citizens" or to go to the wall? Will a basic income be enough to live on?

And what about those of us who are getting benefits now, starting with people with disabilities, in recognition of special needs? Will we lose out if our benefits are replaced with a basic income? Who will get the money for the children? In India, where a small basic income exists, the children's allowance goes generally to the mother, like child benefit in the UK.

A basic income may be very useful. But unless the work of reproducing the human race is acknowledged and prioritised, the market economy and the 1% will remain in charge. The economy will not be redirected towards caring. Since the new technology is bound to bring in radical change, we must urgently put forward the changes we need and not allow the economy to be restructured without caring relationships and the care each of us needs to be taken into account.

23. Shouldn't children be socialised in childcare?

There is plenty of evidence that infants, like any other mammal, need a primary carer to feel secure and develop empathy. Childcare with strangers is stressful for infants, and just because they don't remember doesn't mean no trauma remains.

Children are the first to want to socialise when they are ready and every opportunity should be provided for that. Caring for children alone, as is often the case in today's small families, is not ideal for either mother or child. Many mothers hate the isolation and suffer from post-natal depression. If caring were prioritised and mothers/carers got a wage, we could discuss what kind of care we want, get together with others and provide it communally. Childcare is driven by an uncaring market expecting mothers to be available for work 24/7, not by children's needs. It's hard for

mothers to face that often young children don't want to be separated from us even when they want to play with others their age, and that the childcare we pay so much for is traumatic for babies and exploitative for workers. See below what a childcare worker has to say about her work and the children she looks after.

24. Is “early intervention” good for children?

Early state intervention also called education from 0 years are put forward as “progressive” and “liberating” for women. While some state programmes are helpful, others amount to social services demeaning mothers, interfering with the way we raise our children, and to the forced separation of children from their mothers or other primary carer with lifelong consequences for both. In the West, children from low income families and families of colour are more often taken into care and more likely to be criminalised as young adults. In the UK, thousands of children are excluded from school every year and no one knows exactly what is happening to them.³⁴ Anti-radicalisation programmes like Prevent have targeted Muslim children and children of colour, and resulted in thousands of children, some as young as three, being labelled “radical”. In the US, 1.2 million Black students were suspended from K-12 public schools in a single academic year.³⁵

Adoption targets, sexist court rulings in favour of fathers (even those with a history of violence), and the impoverishment of mothers have resulted in a huge increase in the number of children going into care. If the money spent on institutional care for children was used to support mothers or kinship carers, many more families could stay together, and children could get the help they need.

25. What about healthcare and other caring professions?

Undermining care in the family under the pretext that it is a liberation for women undermines the value of caring in the society generally and the

³⁴ In 2013-14, 36,740 children were permanently excluded from primary schools; 110,090 from secondary schools. Danny Dorling, professor of human geography at Oxford University, Guardian 23 February 2016, complains that the UK education system is “extreme, cruel and unusual”.

³⁵ <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/black-children-suspended-and-expelled-from-schools-at-extremely-high-rates/>

caring professions in particular. The caring professions are in the majority women: in the UK **National Health Service 80% of staff are women**. All have suffered from the low status placed on caring. Doctors, midwives, nurses and nursery workers have described how privatisation creates conditions that prevent them from caring. Their concerns have been echoed by whistleblowers who have exposed the brutality they have witnessed in hospitals, care homes and detention centres for asylum seekers. Placing caring, rather than the market, at the centre would enhance every caring profession.

26. Is fighting for justice caring work?

Women are so invested in nurturing life that we rise to defend it when it is under threat. Everywhere and in every situation – poverty, environmental devastation, war, occupation – women are doing justice work. This is an extension of caring work – fighting for loved ones when they are ill-treated, discriminated against, sacked, raped, killed, disappeared, imprisoned, detained, deported ... for trying to survive, for blowing the whistle, for protesting.

27. Can technology help with caring?

Yes. It could free our time from jobs machines can do. But by threatening our jobs, automation is taking our incomes rather than giving us time. It is also replacing human contact which frustrates and isolates us. Intensive agriculture and polluting technologies destroy our health and our environment. If our needs were central and we got wages for caring, we could develop technology that is ecological, doesn't torture animals, and frees our time and energy.

28. Is this caring perspective good for the environment?

The market-led economy has driven the planet to the brink. It is not only human beings and animals who are suffering; the climate has been affected and now threatens our very survival. The suicidal greed of the 1% is preventing us from stopping global warming; treating it as "unaffordable"! While many rejoiced that the 2015 Paris conference on climate change came to some agreement, the steps taken are tiny compared to what's needed. A living wage for caring would help redirect the economy towards survival rather than growth. That's what the climate needs.

29. Who supports this?

Our petition for a living wage for mothers and other carers is jointly issued by *Global Women's Strike (GWS)* and *Women of Colour/GWS* and sponsored by *Every Mother is a Working Mother Coalition*, *Military Families Speak Out*, *Welfare Warriors (US)*; *Nawa Chhattisgarh Mahila Samiti (India)*; *Federación Sindical de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores del Hogar (Peru)*; *Single Mothers' Self-Defence*, *WinVisible – women with visible and invisible disabilities (UK)*; and *Payday men's network*. Others who support the petition include: *All African Women's Group*, *International Prostitutes Collective*, *Lactation Consultants GB*, *Mothers At Home Matter*, *Scottish Kinship Care Alliance*, *Queer Strike*; *Taxpayers Against Poverty*, *Women Against Rape*, *Mumia Abu-Jamal*, *Ian Hodson* (president of the Bakers Union), *Ken Loach*, *John McDonnell MP* (Labour Party shadow chancellor), *Martina Navratilova*, *Vivienne Westwood ...*

30. Can we win wages for mothers and other carers?

It depends on whether we build a movement to fight for it. The abolition of slavery, the eight-hour day, the right for women to inherit land, maternity leave, child benefit, the criminalisation of domestic violence and rape in marriage ... all seemed unattainable when they were first fought for. We cannot stop global warming and prevent technology from destroying rather than enhancing human life unless we adopt a caring perspective, a lens through which all is measured and valued. What better way to start than to pay mothers and other carers?

PETITION TO ALL GOVERNMENTS

A living wage for mothers and other carers

Caring for others is the foundation of every society, yet this work, done mostly by women, is devalued and underfunded.

We demand that:

1. Every worker be paid a living wage, including mothers and other carers.
2. National and international budgets redirect financial support and resources to mothers and other carers.

You can sign at: www.globalwomenstrike.net

We demand a living wage for mothers and other carers because:

Every worker is entitled to a living wage. Women do 2/3 of the world's work – in the home, on the land and in the community – but most of this work is unwaged.

Women are the primary carers everywhere in the world, fighting for the survival and well-being of children and sick, disabled and elderly people, in the home and outside, in peace as in war. Women grow most of the world's food.

Most carers, starting with mothers, get no wages and aren't considered workers.

Many carers are themselves disabled; many are children caring for younger ones or for their disabled parents; many are grandparents leaving retirement to care for their children's children.

Caring is demanding work but the skills it requires are undervalued even in the job market – domestic work, homecare, childcare and even nursing are low paid.

Valuing caring work would help to close the income gap between women and

men. It would also draw more men into caring.

Financial dependence when caring work is unwaged often traps women in violent relationships.

Many mothers do several jobs and have to fit time with their children around their job – this is exhausting and stressful for all.

When mothers are impoverished and overworked, children suffer: hunger, ill-health, violence and exploitation.

Mothers who have to return to other work soon after childbirth are less likely to breastfeed.

Workers who take time off to care for children or other loved ones, lose pay, promotion, social security and future pension.

Devaluing caring work devalues people, relationships and life itself.

Investing in carers redirects economic and social policies towards survival, health and well-being – for every individual and for the planet which sustains us all.

A childcare worker speaks about her job

I am a childcare worker. Our nursery has four sections: babies, toddlers, 2-3 and 3-5. The toddler section has up to 18 children. The babies section up to 9. The 2-3 has 22 and the 3-5 up to 25.

Babies come in from birth to 14 months; toddlers from 14 to 24 months. We are supposed to have a ratio of one worker to three babies or toddlers, but sometimes it's one to four. From 2-3 it's one to four, 3-5 one to eight. Usually I look after toddlers who are 14 to 24 months. I start work at 8am sharp. When we register a new child, we record name and information about health, allergies, medication, etc., so we know the child's background.

The workers of each section meet and work out a plan. We put together the information on every child, what they can do, what words they can say ... so we know how they are doing and how they are progressing. Every day we tell the parents what the child did that day, if the child is happy or not.

You have to have a passion for children or you can't do a good job. The children are being passed from the mother to another person. I feel emotionally sad because a three month old baby should be in bed, in her or his mother's arms not with strangers. We try our best to make them feel loved and comfortable; it should be one to one but we can't

because we have three or four children to look after. Each child will not be able to relate to the same worker all the time, they will be passed on from worker to worker, and that's very difficult for the child and also for the staff. It happens all the time that a number of children are crying at the same time, they can get very upset because they need the attention and the attention is not here for them.

In my opinion a small child should be in their mother's arms not in public arms. We don't know what the mothers' reasons are for putting the child in the nursery but I find it very sad that they are separated from each other.

Some mothers, especially professional women, want to go out to work. But others want to stay with their children and are not able to; instead of getting the support they need, they are pushed to go out. It's not easy for the children and the parents if the children have been in childcare and have never had basic home caring – the family bond. The parents go to work to get money but the family bond cannot be replaced, if you don't get it as a child you never get it back.

Some parents find it difficult to leave the children and are stressed, especially the mothers; the fathers are more detached. If the parents see you are a caring person they feel

less stressed. Because I have children of my own and have raised them by myself, I understand how they feel and I try my best for their children. But some of the workers are very young, they have never raised children – they know what to do but the emotional experience is not there, they don't have a natural feeling for the child, they sometimes don't even know how to cuddle a child who cries.

Most of the babies have stopped being breastfed before they come to the nursery. The youngest one I saw was three months old.

Some parents have no appreciation of what we are doing for their children. Some of the white parents are very racist – if you are Black they think you know nothing, they prefer to talk to the white person. Then they realise that you know more than they thought and that you know more about their children than they do, and they end up respecting you more.

I had one child who was very close to me, her mother was a lawyer and she always talked to the white worker. One day when she came in to drop her daughter the white

worker wasn't there so she had to give her daughter to me. The mother watched us for a long while and was shocked that her daughter was so attached to me. She asked me for how long this had been going on and I said every day from the beginning. Her attitude towards me changed after that.

Most of the parents are professionals – doctors, lawyers, barristers, architects, teachers, civil servants – on good wages. They pay £1000 a month per child for five days a week childcare, less if the child comes less days. Most of the staff are paid the minimum wage to do a really difficult job. We are bringing up children in ways that are not our own, it's not our own children, and we have to go along with government requirements. The job is very emotional because the mother drops the child and the child is crying and you have to make it comfortable for the child and the mother. It

I take home £1,100 per month plus £69.74 per week in child benefit and working tax credit. I leave home at 7am and I'm back at 6pm five days a week.

The **Global Women's Strike** (GWS) is an international network campaigning for recognition and payment for all caring work, for a caring economy where the market is at the service of human beings not human beings at the service of the market, and for an end to power relations of sex, race, class, nationality, immigration status, age, disability, occupation, sexuality ... We sum up our perspective as: *invest in caring, not killing*.

As with all that GWS does, this Q&A is a collective effort of our national and international network.



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