

Bringing female unemployment into the spotlight

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November 21, 2020



It has been almost a year since Covid-19 first appeared in the world, and the pandemic has affected many aspects of our lives, from the way we work and study to the way we socialize and attend events. One area in particular that has disproportionately affected women is in relation to work. Many women have given up their jobs and chose to stay at home to help children with distance learning, while others have been laid off as businesses struggled to stay afloat.

A recent report released by the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reveals that women workers are being forced out of employment. The very first industries that shut down were those which hired mostly women, including the education, healthcare, childcare, retail and hospitality sectors. According to [the data](#), 40 percent of all working women are employed in these specific industries, compared to only 20 percent of all working men. Of all the women who celebrated getting hired in February, three in every ten women did not return to work in the following three months. That compels a question: is that 'normal' during a recession?

In past recessions, due to the cyclical nature as well as the gender composition of the industries, it was men who usually suffered the brunt of recession. In 2008, male-dominated industries, such as construction and financial services, laid off employees in huge chunks. However, a different pattern is being observed this year, which has encouraged the conversation about unemployment among women workers during the pandemic. Although every recession is dissimilar as it is caused by distinctive root causes, what brings unemployment among women into the spotlight is that among government jobs and the childcare industry, women are being laid off in disproportionate numbers, with labor participation for women aged twenty and above experiencing four times the decline as compared to that of men.

Among the reasons why women are bearing the brunt during the recession triggered by the pandemic is the shutting down of schools and daycare centers. Normatively, mothers bear greater responsibility in childcare. Thus, it is posing additional problems for working mothers, especially single mothers. Only 22 percent of women have jobs which allow the flexibility to telecommute as compared to 28 percent of male workers. Among single parents, only 20 percent hold jobs which allow them to telecommute as opposed to 40 percent of the married couples. Of those married, 44 percent of households have both partners working full time, but 60 percent of the childcare responsibility rests on the mother's shoulders.

Another reason why that is worrying is because during the recovery year of 2019 from the poor state of labor force participation of prime age adults, it was women workers who were driving the economy forward and not men, especially because women are now more educated than men. From the past experiences of mass lay-offs, we have learned that proclivities in unemployment, gender norms and family dynamics which occur do not revert, but rather leave long lasting impacts on future trends. The decline is concentrated between the ages of 35-54.

Nevertheless, although women are currently suffering unemployment disproportionately due to the pandemic, with more willing fathers sharing the responsibility of child care, the lopsided distribution of unemployment will become more balanced.

We acknowledge that these are unusual and challenging times, which is why it is more important than ever that we strive to support each other. If you know a woman in your life who has been laid off or is struggling to balance work and childcare, consider reaching out and offer whatever assistance you can.