

# Women juggling caregiving take brunt of pandemic labour impact<sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Ho, Salarina & Dunham, Jackie

**Source:** CTV News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 4 May 2020

## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

TORONTO -- A typical day for Kim Jackson begins very early in the morning helping her husband, who suffers from a chronic kidney disease, with his dialysis treatment. She then goes and feeds her five-year-old daughter breakfast before returning and checking on her husband. By the time all that is done, it's one o'clock in the afternoon and time for lunch. Between helping her husband and "mommy duties" throughout the day, she tries to check email and tackle urgent work-related issues.

For Jackson, a tenure-track professor at the University of Western Ontario, trying to meet academic expectations has been difficult.

"It's just been extremely challenging to sort of balance these requirements in any sort of way. And to be honest, I feel like I'm failing in many aspects," Jackson told CTVNews.ca in a phone interview.

"As women in academics, we're already working so hard to challenge the social norms, and the explicit and unconscious biases that already exist in the academy. And then we're adding on to this a huge event that is going to really dramatically change productivity and outcomes during this period - however long it is."

Luna Vives, an assistant professor at the University of Montreal, faces similar struggles. As a single mom to a five- and nine-year-old, she gets up before they do and goes to bed very late trying to juggle her schedule around meetings, recording course lectures, homeschooling and other activities. Academic research is on hold because it's simply not possible now.

"The day is like an obstacle course from beginning to end," she said, with relaxation "the first thing that goes out the window."

With expectations the pandemic will prevent life from returning to normal indefinitely, the impact of that uncertainty is being disproportionately felt by working mothers - from those in academia finding themselves publishing fewer papers than their male counterparts, to those in the service industry unable to return to work without childcare provisions.

The United Nations warned last month that the pandemic was "deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems, which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic."

"As women take on greater care demands at home, their jobs will also be disproportionately affected by cuts and lay-offs. Such impacts risk rolling back the already fragile gains made in female labor force participation, limiting women's ability to support themselves and their families, especially for female-headed households," the UN wrote in a policy brief examining the impact of COVID-19 on women.

According to Statistics Canada, nearly 300,000 women between the ages of 25 and 54 lost their jobs in March. That's more than double the number of men in the same age bracket who are now out of work. Nearly half of those women worked part-time, often in low-paying jobs within the service and care industries. And even though women make up less than half the workforce in Canada, they accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total jobs lost. At the same time, StatsCan says single mothers make up 81 per cent of single-parent households. Nearly 70 per cent of them work, 78 per cent work full-time.

## CHILDCARE PART OF THE RECOVERY EQUATION

With some provinces looking to slowly open the economy again even as schools remain closed, and the C.D. Howe Institute's Business Cycle Council declaring Friday that Canada has officially entered a recession, the ability for women to realistically return to the workforce could have a major impact on the economic recovery itself.

"You're not going to have a recovery without childcare. It's that simple," Armine Yalnizyan told CTV's Your Morning. She called it the first "service-led recession" in economic history and said many of the workers employed with businesses that have shut down are women. She also noted that in many jurisdictions, free childcare is provided for many essential workers, allowing them to work, and that those provisions need to be expanded as the economy restarts.

"How are we going to proceed in recovering without affordable, accessible childcare for shift workers too?" Yalnizyan asked. "COVID has revealed a lot of things and that's one of the things it's revealed - the essential nature of childcare ... life doesn't go back to normal just

because work reopens.”

Without adequate childcare support, more women are likely to stay home, she explained, prolonging the recovery period. A parent may also decide to keep their child home if they feel that it is not yet safe to send them to daycare, for example. Fewer kids could also mean higher costs for the provider that could be passed on to families.

“When people’s finances have been stripped and childcare is such a big, monthly cost for young families, it’s unclear who’s going to be sending their kids back to childcare, which means less household income,” said Yalnizyan, who also worries that gains made by women over the long run may be lost in the medium term.

“This is not a short-term phenomenon.”

## WOMEN PUBLISHING FEWER RESEARCH PAPERS

Back in academia, several news articles and conversations on social media recently highlighted the fact that academic journal editors were noticing that women were submitting fewer papers.

The deputy editor for the British Journal for the Philosophy of Science recently tweeted, “Negligible number of submissions to the journal from women in the last month. Never seen anything like it.” The co-editor for Comparative Political Studies responded by noting that submissions from women were unchanged year over year from women, but were up nearly 50 percent for men.

The University of Montreal’s Luna Vives, who is also an editor for ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, said their publication has paused accepting new submissions unrelated to COVID-19 for the time being to accommodate these very challenges.

“We work ... with authors that come from marginalized communities, a lot of them women. So we realize that they are actually the ones in the most vulnerable positions when it comes to publication,” Vives said, adding that the pandemic has brought to light and exacerbated the inequalities that have always existed.

“It’s not a perfect response to the situation, but we decided that we’re not going to accept articles for the time being until this passes and we’re not going to send out requests for peer reviews.”

Both Vives and Western’s Kim Jackson are on probationary contracts, which means they must “prove” themselves and be judged by the academic community based on the quality and quantity of their research and the number and size of the grants they will receive.

“My research productivity is basically grinding to a halt right now,” said Jackson. “It’s a really creative and cerebral exercise, and I don’t have the capacity to do that right now.”

Still, Jackson considers herself fortunate in some ways, citing a colleague who taught three courses and had to pivot to online teaching in three days while juggling care for three children.

Regardless of the industry, employers, businesses, and institutions across the entire economic spectrum may no longer be able to ignore these system issues.

“It’s a really different, extraordinary circumstance right now,” said Jackson, who is “cautiously optimistic” that the pandemic will force a sea change in workplace equity.

“We have a situation here that we need to attend to if we do want to be equitable workplaces for gender and race...I think this will actually bring it to the forefront and cause people to pay attention whereas maybe in the past it wouldn’t drum up so much interest.”

### Related link:

**Region:** [Canada](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** [equality](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

[labour](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[women](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 7 May 2020):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/05/women-juggling-caregiving-take-brunt-pandemic-labour-impact>

### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/05/women-juggling-caregiving-take-brunt-pandemic-labour-impact> <sup>[2]</sup>

[https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/women-juggling-caregiving-take-brunt-of-pandemic-labour-impact-1.4921334#\\_gus&\\_gucid=&\\_gup=twitter&\\_gsc=iJ6Z0Kc](https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/women-juggling-caregiving-take-brunt-of-pandemic-labour-impact-1.4921334#_gus&_gucid=&_gup=twitter&_gsc=iJ6Z0Kc) <sup>[3]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> <sup>[4]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/equality> <sup>[5]</sup> <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8940> <sup>[6]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/women>