

When it comes to going back to work, COVID-19 is impacting Canadian mothers more than fathers: study ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

VANCOUVER -- Recent research suggests the pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on Canadian mothers when it comes to going back to work.

Data analyzed by the University of British Columbia suggests the gender gap has been widening since the country saw its first few cases of COVID-19.

In a news release Tuesday, the Vancouver-based school said the gap between fathers and mothers going back to work went from 0.8 to 7.3 percentage points for parents of school-aged children.

The gap also increased for those with preschoolers, from 1.0 to 2.5 percentage points.

The UBC researchers say child care is a major factor.

With schools closed across the country, parents were forced to find other options, and much of that responsibility fell to mothers.

Among the reasons why moms are staying home is which parent makes more money.

"A pre-existing gender pay gap has created an incentive in many families for fathers to remain in the workforce. Mothers are also more likely to work part-time jobs that are first to be cut during economic crises. And in families with less education, mothers often work in retail and hospitality jobs that were hit hard by lockdowns," the news release from UBC said.

"By this point it's become clear that the pandemic is not the 'great equalizer,'" UBC sociology professor Sylvia Fuller said in a statement.

Fuller said the study she conducted with UBC's Yue Qian showed that, "just as some people have proved more vulnerable to getting really sick, some groups are more vulnerable economically and socially as a result of the pandemic."

Fuller described the pandemic as having a dramatic impact on mothers' employment.

It's not the first time a difference has been discussed. Last month, B.C. Finance Minister Carole James said the latest unemployment data showed gender, as well as age, income level and sector, were factors in who is being hit hardest.

"The majority of job losses have happened to people who are making at (or) near minimum wage. That means young people and women have been the most vulnerable," James said in mid-June.

Speaking about the unemployment rate in B.C. in May, James said women were 25 per cent more likely to be out of work than men, and nearly two-thirds of people who've lost their jobs in the service sector are women.

The service sector accounts for 90 per cent of B.C. job loss, James said last month.

At the time, she cited child care as among the reasons why women are disproportionately impacted.

UBC's study also looked at parents' impact based on education level.

Those with high school diplomas or less, whose children are school aged, saw the biggest widening of the gap.

In February, UBC says, women's unemployment was 1.6 percentage points behind men's.

But by May, that gap was more than 10 times larger, at 16.8 percentage points.

The data used in the study was obtained through Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey. Researchers looked only at people who were employed at the start of the pandemic or in the previous year, which the school says amounted to about 110,000.

The study was posted Monday by Canadian Public Policy, a quarterly journal on economic and social policies.

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