

COVID-19 has fostered 'perfect storm pushing women out of their jobs': UBC study co-author ^[1]

Author: Ryan, Denise

Source: Vancouver Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 9 Jul 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Access video interview with Dr. Sylvia Fuller via YouTube ^[3]

EXCERPTS

When Deb Perlman wrote in a New York Times oped last week that "In the COVID-19 economy, you're allowed only a kid or a job," she didn't specify that mothers have been particularly hard hit by the catastrophe.

She didn't have to.

"It is something everyone has been thinking about," said Sylvia Fuller, professor of sociology at the University of B.C., and co-author of new research showing a gender gap that has widened dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Mothers bear the brunt of the family burden when kids stay home, and are less likely to recover their careers as the economy reboots.

The numbers are staggering, with education levels contributing to deeper economic disparities.

COVID-19 has highlighted gender inequality among less-educated parents. For parents with a university degree, those who may be in higher paid and more flexible jobs, Fuller's research shows a dip in employment briefly in March, but a recovery similar to pre-pandemic levels.

According to the UBC report, among parents with a high school education or less women's employment was 1.6 per cent lower than their male counterparts in February, prior to the declaration of the pandemic and the economic shutdown. By May, that gap had increased to 16.8 percentage points.

The employment gap for parents of all education levels has moved from 0.8 per cent to 7.3 per cent for parents of school-age children, and from one to 2.5 per cent for parents of pre-schoolers.

Fuller attributes this to the possibility that parents of pre-schoolers did not have the burden of home-schooling their children and may have been more able to juggle work with parenting.

Many of the jobs hit hard by the pandemic were female-dominated, in-person service jobs, precarious or part-time jobs, and the closure of schools and the lack of care alternatives created what Fuller calls "a perfect storm for pushing women out of their jobs."

Two parents who are university educated and have jobs that they can work from home were better able to recover, said Fuller, but families with high school education or less saw "dramatic decreases" in employment, with those decreases tied to a lack of child care. "If you are working as a cashier you can't bring your child to work with you," said Fuller.

Getting back into the workforce once the economy gets rolling again will be even harder without adequate child care or full-time school available. "The longer the pandemic goes on, without having good care options available for people, the more likely that families are going to reach the breaking point."

If parents don't have adequate child care, families will most often choose for the higher income earner to return to work. That parent most likely will be the father.

"When push comes to shove, it's the women that get shoved," said Fuller.

"We already see the motherhood pay penalty, where women disproportionately get slotted into jobs that pay worse than men's. Losing one's job and then trying to get back into the labour market in the wake of a pandemic, losing that continuity is really a killer for people's careers."

Sharon Gregson, provincial spokesperson for the successful \$10 Day Child Care campaign working with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., said "women have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and this is evidence of that."

Gregson is calling for an immediate expansion of the \$10-a day child-care sites, and for the federal government to earmark \$2.5 billion of

