

Women fall behind in pandemic recovery due to childcare needs, job availability ^[1]

The gender gap is widening and the pandemic is exacerbating it, sociology professor says

Author: Froese, Ian

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 20 Jul 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Stephanie Laubenstein somehow balanced full-time work, parenting and teaching during a pandemic – all while her dog (sort of) ate her son's homework.

Her nine-year-old, Benjamin, made the discovery one day, and it wasn't like those fabricated excuses teachers have dismissed for years.

"He'd come bellowing into my [home] office in the middle of a call and say, 'Mom, the dog ate my underwear,'" Laubenstein said, smiling at the memory.

"Fortunately the people on the video conference would laugh and let me go deal with the situation and come back.

"I'm hoping everybody is afforded that flexibility and compassion, because it can be hard," Laubenstein said of handling work and parenting simultaneously.

Women more affected

While parents coped with the closures of schools, daycares and their workplaces when the COVID-19 threat was surging, it is clear women faced a disproportionate impact.

After all, women have traditionally handled the majority of parenting duties, and hold low-paying service jobs more vulnerable to the whims of pandemic-induced closures, said Susan Prentice, University of Manitoba sociology professor.

Women are lagging behind, even as the economy sputters back, "both because the jobs aren't available, and because somebody has to mind the kids," Prentice said.

"Very often in a two-parent family, people sit down and they get out a pen and they look at who's going to make more money and who wants to stay home," she said. "Very often this means that a mother is less likely to go back to work."

The gender gap is widening and the pandemic is exacerbating it, Prentice said.

Laubenstein spent many days travelling as director of sales and business development at New Flyer.

When the pandemic hit Manitoba, she was grounded in Winnipeg. Before long, her son was homebound too, since his school and daycare closed.

Her son didn't go to his father's place, since the family worried of Benjamin's exposure to COVID-19 (he's high-risk) and his father works with the public.

"All of a sudden I became a full-time mom, a full-time businesswoman and a full-time teacher, and it became really hard to balance all of those requirements," she said.

'You just cannot do all of it'

Eventually, she could call upon her parents once stay-at-home orders eased, and her son could go back to his father's place. She got counselling help and said her child-care spot will reopen soon.

As for unprompted office interruptions, her son doesn't say a peep to his mother anymore – he grabs her old phone and sends her text messages instead.

"One of the keys," his mother said, is "you have to realize you just cannot do all of it."

The economic downturn has been called a "she-cession," since women are significantly exiting the workforce due to lost jobs and inadequate child care.

In Manitoba, nearly 11,000 fewer women were working full-time in the labour force this June than the previous June, a 8.1 per cent decrease, according to Statistics Canada.

The unemployment rate for women over the age of 25, which was 10.3 per cent in May, was virtually on par with men at 8.3 per cent in June, but that doesn't account for women who exited the workforce altogether, Prentice said.

She said a major expansion in child-care spaces would address this inequity. She said one space for every five Manitoba kids isn't sufficient.

Prentice hopes the pandemic will spur decision-makers to rectify the deficiency.

"I think that many political leaders didn't have to think about how much child care was essential in order for the economy to function — and now they do."

Calls for higher wages, more sick days

Lynne Fernandez, Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues at the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives, is calling for higher wages and more sick days for the jobs our society is finally starting to respect, such as grocery clerks and cleaners.

Until then, she said, men are moving into jobs women held.

"If this goes on for a long time, there's actually some real worries about how the long-term effects of women in the labour market could be."

The pandemic also challenged women in professional, stable jobs.

Celia Valel and her husband alternated days at work, stretching into weekends. When it was her turn, she logged 12-hour plus days, and then did as much work as possible on her off days while caring for three kids under the age of nine.

"I would often not see my kids when they woke up and didn't see them before they went to bed either."

It got to the point where it wasn't sustainable for herself or her husband, Valel said.

"It was just such a prolonged time and not seeing the end, I think it was very demoralizing."

Thankfully, she said child-care spaces came together recently, but she feels uncertain looking ahead. She doesn't know how the fall will look, whether in-person classes will fully return, and if a second wave of COVID-19 could unwind the progress being made.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: mother's labour force participation ^[4]

women ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 21 Jul 2020): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/07/women-fall-behind-pandemic-recovery-due-childcare-needs-job>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/07/women-fall-behind-pandemic-recovery-due-childcare-needs-job> [2]

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/women-manitoba-facing-pandemic-pain-job-parenting-1.5653969>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/women-manitoba-facing-pandemic-pain-job-parenting-1.5653969> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7857> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/women>