

Left behind: Two decades of economic progress for single mothers at risk of being wiped out ^[1]

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The school year has started with huge trepidation and heightened worry about the fate of our kid's education and well-being, and growing fears about what the future holds as daily infection numbers climb.

Even if we manage to avoid a second wave of the coronavirus—a big if—there will be inevitable and lengthy disruptions in the event of illness among children, educators or staff. The supply of alternative child care is limited and costly. Families may or may not have other caregivers that can pitch in. This is certainly true for hundreds of thousands of single parent families working hard to pay the rent, feed and care for their kids within the narrow confines of their family bubbles.

So what will happen when the school closes for two weeks, or the rest of term? How will parents be able to work? How will mothers be able to work? Will mothers even have a choice?

Without support, the killer combination of trying to work, juggle child care and support children's schooling indefinitely may push back women's rights and opportunities by decades. Are we going to stand by and watch this happen?

Disproportionate job loss, lagging recovery for most marginalized

The economic security of women in Canada has been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, threatening equality gains. Women are returning to work or picking up additional hours, but months after the onset of the crisis their employment lags behind that of men, and their economic security remains fragile.

Economic losses have fallen most dramatically on women living on low incomes who experience intersecting inequalities based on race, class, education, sexuality, disability, and migration and immigration status. Many have lost employment or had their hours cut back significantly and are now sitting on the sidelines of the recovery.

The August jobs report from Statistics Canada shows that, since April, women have recouped almost two-thirds of February-April employment losses (63.4%), and less than one-half of full-time job losses (46.2%). Core-aged women (25–54) saw larger gains than youth (15–24) and older women (55+). For all age groups, the recovery among men is more advanced.

Women's job growth has been mostly in part-time work. A summer boost in part-time work in hard-hit industries such as retail and food services spurred employment among low-wage workers, but their rate of recovery continues to be slower than that of higher paid employees, lagging by 12 percentage points (87% vs. 99%), notably among women (at 86%).

Not everyone is finding their way back to the labour market. A large group of women who left the labour force through the first months of the pandemic have yet to return. Among core-aged women (aged 25–54 years), the number of women outside of the labour market increased by 425,000 (or 34.1%) between February and April. By August, the size of this group was smaller, but still in excess of 100,000 workers—roughly three-quarters (76.0%) of February's levels.

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- [1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/09/left-behind-two-decades-economic-progress-single-mothers>
- [2] <https://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/09/16/left-behind-two-decades-of-economic-progress-for-single-mothers-at-risk-of-being-wiped-out/>
- [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/03/covid-19-crisis-response-must-address-gender-faultlines>
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