

COVID-19 is not an equal-opportunity virus. Women still do the lion's share of parenting tasks amid the pandemic ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

There's no question dads have stepped up during the pandemic; playing more often with the kids, cooking dinner a few more nights a week, perhaps. Maybe even helping with homework.

But, since March, when the virus tipped everyone's life upside down, women report they are still doing the lion's share of parental tasks, according to a new study released Tuesday by Statistics Canada.

While men surveyed as part of "Caring for Their Children; Impacts of COVID-19 on Parents" said they shared equally in some of the tasks during COVID, including putting kids to bed and taking them to school, men working outside the home were less likely to say they did more than women.

But the study showed that even the men who worked from home, appeared to do less than the women.

"The men were more likely to say they share the tasks equally," study author Karine Leclerc told the Star. "But men tend to overestimate their contribution to unpaid work related to the family as well as all domestic and parental responsibilities. This trend is well known, in fact."

This study, along with an unrelated survey conducted in part by YWCA Canada and also released Tuesday, underscores how COVID is not an equal-opportunity virus. While it may not discriminate about who it infects, it seems to prefer messing with the lives and careers of women, forcing them back into the stereotyped gender roles feminism has fought, for so long.

"It has been very, very clear that in the pandemic women have experienced gendered impacts disproportionately," said Anuradha Dugal, senior director of Community Initiatives and Policy for the Canadian Women's Foundation.

"Why are women taking on these extra roles? Because they are expected to."

Lauren Bialystok, associate professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, who researches feminist philosophy, gender and education, said women's work is often considered more dispensable and more flexible because of the gender-wage gap. If a family has to make tough decisions and adjust to unexpected child-care needs, she said, or if one parent has to take a hit in earning or ask for more time off work, on average it makes sense that it is more likely to be the woman. "We still have a lot of work to do in equalizing the workforce and erasing the gender-wage gap."

Unlike any other events in recent Canadian history, Dugal said, the pandemic threatens to roll back the strides in gender equality made over the last several decades. That is why, she said, it is imperative to fund the organizations that are fighting for women's rights.

According to the second survey, conducted by YWCA Canada, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA), Canadian Women's Foundation, G(irls)20 and Oxfam Canada, COVID has not just impacted the lives of individual women disproportionately, it has also affected organizations that support them. Roughly half of the 117 grassroots organizations surveyed for this study said they did not have the funding to find their way during this crisis — and have had to reduce or cancel programs, such as child care and mental health and disability support.

Anjum Sultana, national director of Public Policy and strategic communications for YWCA Canada, said these women's organizations have been underfunded since long before COVID, but now they are slammed with extra expenses, such as trying to move online or provide personal protective equipment. Moving online, she said, has been a particular challenge because many of the clients of these organizations don't have laptops or Wi-Fi to support getting online services.

Adding insult to injury, she and other stakeholders said, most of these grassroots organizations are staffed by women, who are themselves struggling with all the same issues of the female clients they serve, including extra child-care duties.

Bailey Greenspon, acting co-CEO of G(irls)20, which provides leadership training to marginalized youth, said her small organization has

had to cut the hours of its all-women staff in order to stave off layoffs.

But what's most frustrating, she said, is that her organization is trying to pivot to meet the new demands of the pandemic, but it doesn't have enough funding to do so. "We have never experienced this before," she said. "Our funding is restrictive right now and it is difficult to respond to demands."

The Statistics Canada study surveyed about 1,000 men and women about the domestic duties they performed.

Leclerc, a Statistics Canada Analyst with the Centre for Gender Diversity and Inclusion Statistics, said the respondents were taken from a larger government survey pool of people across Canada and the sample is representative of all Canadians.

Correction — Dec. 15, 2020: This article was edited to correct the spelling of Bailey Greenspon's surname. The spelling of Anuradha Dugal's surname was also corrected on second reference. It was clarified that G(irls)20 cuts hours for staff to avoid layoffs.

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