

COVID shut down child care centers – and sent unemployment soaring for women ^[1]

Author: Cataudella, Kimberly

Source: Truthout

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Mar 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The pandemic shut down child care centers across the country. It's no coincidence that it also sent unemployment rates soaring among women, especially those with young children.

That's not only the conclusion of many mothers, but also of a recent study by the Centre for Economic Policy Research.

The unusual events of the last year broadly expanded the number of women facing child care crises, but this problem predated COVID-19, fueled by racial inequity and the gender wage gap.

"Low paying jobs with unaffordable child care creates a demographic that's already in trouble and really poor," said Mary C. King, an economics professor at Portland State University. "Among those particularly are women of color being disproportionately affected in front-line, face-to-face service work, which are the low-paying jobs that got hit first with unemployment."

One in four working women – 15.5 million in all – has a child younger than 14 at home, according to the Brookings Institution. More than 10 million of these women rely on child care and school for their children while they're at work.

The 2020 recession was the first on record in which women's unemployment rates rose significantly more than men's, prompting some to call it the "shcession."

Even before the pandemic hit, nearly half of all working women in the U.S. held low-paying jobs with a median wage of \$10.93 an hour, according to Brookings. These positions – often known as "pink collar" jobs and common among women of color – make women more susceptible to poverty. Over 50% of Black and 64% of Hispanic women are paid low wages, Brookings said, compared with 40% of white women.

"The lack of child care infrastructure is finally impacting white, middle-class mothers who, historically, have been able to buy their way out of child care crises in this country," said Katie B. Garner, executive director of the International Association of Maternal Action and Scholarship. "Mothers impacted by a lack of child care are mostly essential workers who work outside the home, and before the pandemic, many of them barely pocketed enough to cover child care in the first place."

Big differences in income and job flexibility by race also meant many more white mothers than mothers of color had child care alternatives they could turn to when the pandemic hit, said Nina Smith, an associate professor at North Carolina Central University.

"These can include things like juggling home care with a partner, taking a break from employment or working from home," Smith said.

During the first two months of pandemic shutdowns, mothers with children age 13 or younger reduced their work hours five times as much as fathers, according to the Centre for Economic Policy Research. Many mothers weren't laid off. They had no choice but to stop working and care for their young children.

The latest coronavirus relief bill put \$24 billion toward emergency funds for the child care industry, \$160 billion toward reopening schools safely and \$1,400 per child in direct payments to parents. That provides some help to women with unmet child care needs, though experts say it won't solve the problem.

"While COVID may have been a wake-up call to white mothers and white families, I hope that there is a very deep realization and understanding that this has been an ongoing problem," Garner said. "Black and brown mothers have been dealing with this for such a long time."

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: COVID-19 ^[4]

economic recovery ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 29 Mar 2021): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/03/covid-shut-down-child-care-centers-%E2%80%94-and-sent-unemployment-soaring>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/03/covid-shut-down-child-care-centers-%E2%80%94-and-sent-unemployment-soaring> [2]

<https://truthout.org/articles/covid-shut-down-child-care-centers-and-sent-unemployment-soaring-for-women/> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9040> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9038> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8939>