

For working parents, juggling child care came at a steep cost during Covid ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Every working parent was put to the test in 2020.

Managing job responsibilities along with remote school and other household tasks caused some to fall behind professionally, at least temporarily, while others remain sidelined.

"At the beginning, I thought he could work alongside me, but it proved to be really difficult," said Sara Abate Rezvanifar, 39, referring her 6-year-old son's online schooling.

Helping her kindergartener took up most of the time during normal working hours. "I had to shift my day to later in the afternoon, but that meant I couldn't attend many meetings," she said.

"Towards the second half of the year, I started to scale back and say 'no' to a lot of projects and give it to a team member," the communications director added.

Even now, Abate Rezvanifar, who lives outside of Toronto, said she is unsure what will happen in the fall. Her husband has already returned to the office three days a week but with Covid cases on the rise, whether her son will go back to the classroom is less certain.

Nearly two-thirds, or 62%, of adults with children said their additional child-care and virtual schooling responsibilities during the pandemic hurt their ability to get ahead at work, according to a recent report by the American Staffing Association. The association polled over 2,000 U.S. adults in June.

"Parents are feeling left behind in their careers and in their workplaces," said Richard Wahlquist, the association's president and CEO.

"Some have come back, others have stayed on the sidelines because they couldn't come back. As a society, this is another one of the big challenges."

Child care was a problem long before the pandemic. In fact, the U.S. ranks far behind many other countries when it comes to accessibility and affordability. Canada ranks moderately better. However, Covid made it even more difficult when sudden restrictions dramatically limited access to schools and day-care facilities.

Although child-care challenges fall on both parents, mothers are more likely to manage remote school, as well as take on the additional housework and other responsibilities at home.

During Covid, women spent 20 hours a week on caregiving and housework, McKinsey & Co. and LeanIn.org found in their 2020 Women in the Workplace report.

As a result, 54% of working moms said they felt like they could not give 100% at work, compared with 43% of working dads, according to the Pew Research Center.

Mothers were also more likely than fathers to say they needed to reduce their work hours or take a leave from work. And they were more likely to say they were treated as if they weren't committed to their careers, got passed over for a promotion or had to turn one down due to the current circumstances.

People of color were similarly more likely to say child-care duties have been a career obstacle during Covid, the American Staffing Association report found.

Seven in 10 Black parents and 62% of Hispanic parents said their opportunities for career advancement were negatively affected by their child-care and remote schooling responsibilities, compared with 51% of white parents.

"The impact of Covid that we have seen has disproportionately impacted the populations in most need of assistance," Wahlquist said. "It's the same old story."

When a parent steps out of the workforce, they lose more than just their salary. After factoring in the potential wage growth and lost retirement savings over time, that parent gives up as much as four times their annual income each year, according to Center for American Progress.

To address some of these economic and social challenges, the American Rescue Plan, which became law in March, included \$39 billion specifically for child care.

The plan boosted the child tax credit to \$3,000 from \$2,000 for children 17 and younger and gave an additional \$600 for kids under age 6. Half of the credit started going out to families in July as monthly payments.

This credit alone will help some 65 million children across the U.S., roughly 90% of kids in the country, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Children and their families could also benefit from investments in child care and education baked into the Senate Democrats' budget resolution released Monday. The plan would to extend universal pre-K to 3- and 4-year-old children and expand child-care benefits for working families.

Region: United States ^[3]

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