

COVID-19: Women will bear the brunt of fourth wave's long-term effects ^[1]

"If the adults aren't OK the children aren't going to be OK," said Emily Gawlick, executive director of Early Childhood Educators of B.C.

Author: Griffiths, Nathan

Source: Vancouver Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Aug 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The enormous gender imbalance among teachers and other educators means the impacts from the fourth wave of COVID-19 are going to hit women "particularly hard," says an SFU researcher.

Dr. Julia Smith, who co-leads the Gender and COVID-19 project at SFU, interviewed nearly 200 women doing front line work in B.C., many of whom were teachers or early childhood educators, and found they were working in conditions that frequently lead to anxiety, burnout and long-term mental health challenges.

"Their stress levels are so high," she said. "These women have been on the front lines for a year and a half now. And it's not over, right into this fourth wave."

According to the 2016 census, 95 per cent of early childhood educators and 84 per cent of kindergarten and elementary teachers in B.C. are women.

As the school year approaches and COVID-19 cases continue to rise, advocates for teachers and other educators say more work needs to be done to address the underlying drivers of burnout and stress.

Teri Mooring, president of the B.C. Teachers Federation, said teachers have expressed concern about inadvertently contracting and passing on the virus to children – despite being fully vaccinated – because they didn't show symptoms.

"We're going into an unknown right now with the Delta variant being much more highly transmissible," she said.

"We think there's enough unknown and we think there's enough cause for concern that we should err on the side of caution."

Children under 10 years of age make up 36 per cent of the unvaccinated population in B.C., according to an Aug. 18 report from the B.C. COVID-19 Modelling Group. Cases among children under 10 are already approaching April's weekly average peak of nearly 80 cases per day.

Health authorities announced updated mask requirements for students grade four and above on Aug. 24, along with all K-12 staff. There was no vaccine mandate for education staff or eligible students.

Provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said that even without vaccines last year, schools were a safe setting where the risk of COVID-19 transmission was "very low," and that the best way to protect younger children who can't be immunized is for the adults around them to be vaccinated.

Mooring said she was happy to have a mask mandate in place but said it "doesn't go far enough," and would like to also see testing and vaccination clinics in schools in September.

She said that surveys conducted during the last school year indicated that teachers were reporting twice as much stress during the pandemic as the public. And among teachers, women reported higher levels of physical and mental distress than their male colleagues.

"I attribute that to having personal responsibilities at home as well," she said.

Studies have shown that women in Canada spend twice as much time on child care as men and nearly twice as much time on domestic work. Coupled with pandemic stresses and additional time spent on health and safety measures, it's hardly surprising that burnout is on the rise.

According to a joint UBC/BCTF study, 40 per cent of teachers said the pandemic experience made it more likely that they would leave the profession in the next few years.

"I've never felt more discouraged, unappreciated and deflated while at the same time burned out," one elementary teacher wrote in the

survey.

Mooring said she was “very concerned” about teacher morale and “the long-term impacts” on the profession. The province is already suffering from a shortage of teachers, she said and there aren’t enough new teachers graduating to offset staffing shortages from pandemic burnout.

Emily Gawlick, executive director of the Early Childhood Educators of B.C., said it was important to support educators because many “put themselves second or last in a lot of ways.”

“Early childhood education has always been undervalued because it has been predominantly seen as women’s work,” she said. “The pandemic only emphasized that even more.”

“The people working directly with these children need to feel solid and stable and healthy, to be able to do this important work,” Gawlick said.

She noted that many women count on having child care to support them to be able to get back into the workforce, calling it “a huge driver for the economy.”

Smith said when it comes to pandemic recovery, British Columbians need to think a little bit more broadly than just straight health outcomes.

“We’re not just aiming to recover our public health,” she said. “We also need to recover our economy, our communities, our society, and to do that we need to think a bit more broadly beyond just how to reduce infections.”

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: COVID-19 ^[4]

female labour force participation ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 30 Aug 2021): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/08/covid-19-women-will-bear-brunt-fourth-wave%E2%80%99s-long-term-effects>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/08/covid-19-women-will-bear-brunt-fourth-wave%E2%80%99s-long-term-effects> [2]

<https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/women-will-bear-the-brunt-of-fourth-waves-long-term-effects> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9040> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8939>