

Motherhood and mothering during COVID-19: A gendered intersectional analysis of caregiving during the global pandemic within a Canadian context ^[1]

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Excerpted from introduction

Introduction

On January 25, 2020, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) reported Canada's first presumptive case of COVID-19. Although officially the pandemic would not force government-imposed, province-wide economic and social lockdowns until mid-March, January 25 marked the beginning of the global pandemic within the Canadian context. That day also marked the beginning of a wave of economic, political, and social consequences for women in general and mothers in particular. Some of the consequences to women brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic were increased health, domestic, and work-related burdens. Representing a greater proportion of healthcare workers (Boniol et al.), essential service providers (Robertson and Gebeloff), and informal caregivers (Fast), we explore the importance of a gendered and intersectional perspective to pandemic response and planning. Succinctly put: a host of significant social, political, and economic changes, and taking into account complex and intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, and age, this paper draws on feminist theoretical traditions to explore the effects and consequences of what became a global pandemic on mothers and motherhood primarily within the Canadian context.

Our paper's temporal framework runs from March 11 to the beginning of July 2020. We characterize this time period of the pandemic as the "early stage." Although the first Canadian COVID-19 case was identified in January, we decided to denote March 11, 2020, as the beginning of the pandemic in Canada as this is the date when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. And, by mid-March, provinces across Canada were initiating Stage 1 protocols such as physical distancing, shelter-in-place mandates, school and childcare closures, social and economic lockdowns, and border closures. The beginning of July 2020 marked the end of the early stages of the pandemic as provinces across Canada eased some of these measures. These measures included physical distancing on individuals and communities and further reopened the economy to some degree. However, we recognize that our research does not neatly fit into the paper's temporal boundaries. Various factors contributing to the pandemic, such as food insecurities, domestic violence, and gendered disparities in domestic labor were certainly circulating prior to March, just as the confluence of these pandemic factors certainly extend to some degree beyond our bounded time frame of the beginning of July. Given the existing gender, inequities broadly, and in particular around care work, exploring and understanding how the pandemic in its early stages impacted mothers is of critical importance.

The purpose of this research is threefold. First, drawing on the insights provided by feminist theories, we aim to present a gendered intersectional analysis of caregiving, particularly maternal caregiving, during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Situated in the context of the current global health crisis, we discuss how the pre-existing gender inequities within society were exacerbated during the initial stages of the pandemic and draw closer attention to some of the challenges faced by mothers on the frontlines in both public and private spheres. Secondly, we discuss how the historical underpinnings and assumptions of gender innateness within these professions and roles placed many women and mothers in circumstances that directly affect their overall well-being. Third, drawing from a variety of sources, this paper demonstrates the ways in which the devaluation of paid and unpaid caregiving exceedingly impacts women, particularly mothers.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: gender roles ^[4]

COVID-19 ^[5]

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