

MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN SPEAK ON WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic has heavily affected the life and work of American mothers with young children.

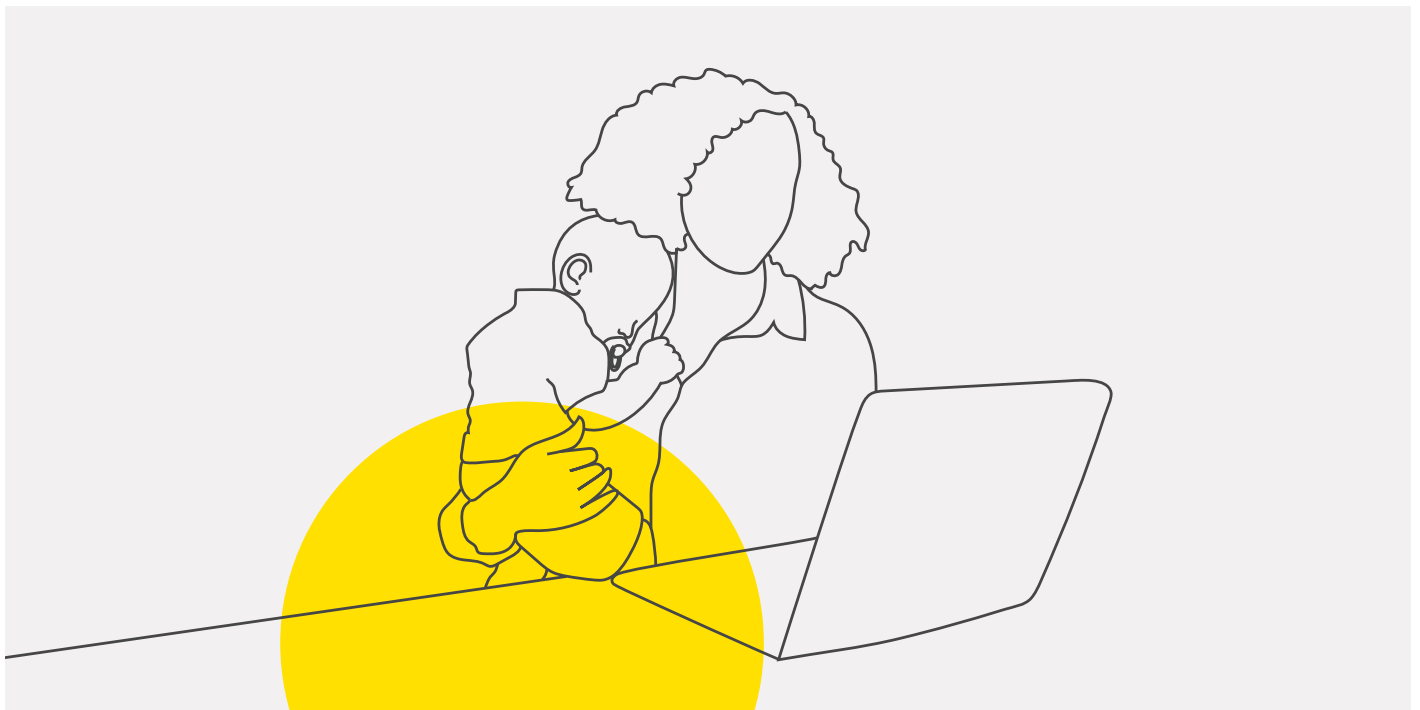
Since the pandemic began, millions of American parents have either lost their job or had their work hours reduced due to lay-offs, disappearing jobs, or needing to care for children as childcare and schools closed.

The resulting instability has led to material hardships for families such as difficulty paying bills, paying rent, and obtaining food.

We have reported previously that these challenges are associated with a chain reaction of hardship in households with young children, in which parents

33%

of women caregivers in our survey have left the workforce or reduced their work hours since the pandemic began



feel more emotional distress as their economic insecurity grows, which cascades into negative effects on children’s well-being.

Put simply, when families with young children experience material hardship, everyone suffers – caregivers and their children.

The pandemic has caused women in particular to disproportionately leave the workforce, take over childcare roles, and deal with the heavy consequences of these changes. With Mother’s Day approaching, we take a closer look at what women in our RAPID-EC survey of American families with a child age birth–5 are saying about work. We report four findings.

“I feel like I have to choose between a job and being a mom.”

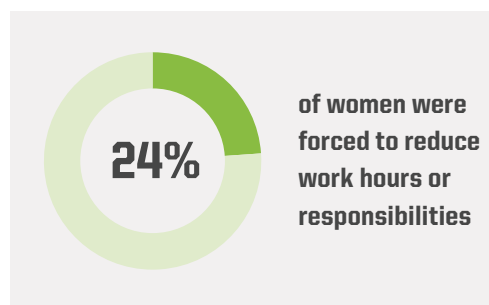
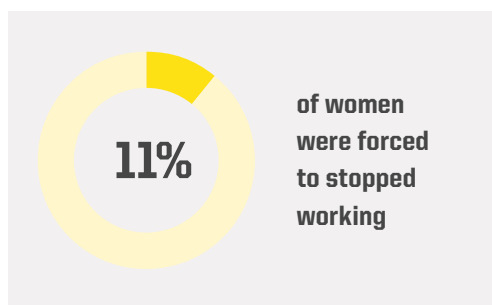
Mother in South Carolina

MORE THAN 1 IN 3 FEMALE CAREGIVERS WERE FORCED* TO STOP WORKING OR REDUCE THEIR WORK HOURS/RESPONSIBILITIES

33% of women in our survey had to leave the workforce or reduce their work hours



***Note**
We use the term “forced” to refer to both employer initiated changes and non-employer initiated changes; based on our qualitative data we assume that in nearly all circumstances, stopping/decreasing work was the result of conditions resulting from the pandemic.



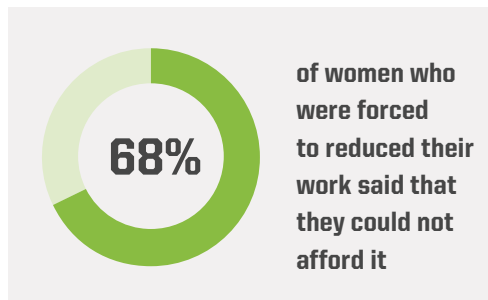
Since the pandemic began, more than 1 in 3 female caregivers in our survey

were forced* to stop working or reduce their work hours/responsibilities.

“It seems there’s very little understanding/compassion in the workforce for working moms, especially when you’re a single working mom.”

Mother in New Hampshire

BUT MOST WOMEN COULD NOT AFFORD TO DO SO



During the pandemic, most women with young children who were forced to stop work or reduce their work

hours/responsibilities reported that they could not afford to do so.

“It’s extremely difficult to parent without any assistance or help during the pandemic, while simultaneously searching for employment.”

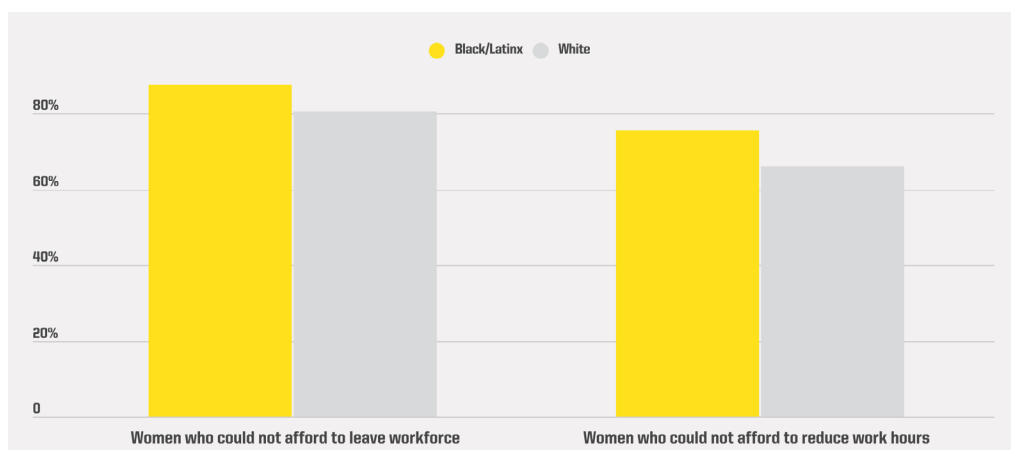
Mother in New Jersey

BLACK AND LATINX WOMEN WERE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO SAY THAT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD THESE CHANGES

– 88% of Black and Latinx women who stopped working said that they could not afford it, compared with 81% of White women.

– 76% of Black and Latinx women who reduced work said that they could not afford it, compared with 66% of White women.

Women who cannot afford to leave workforce or reduce hours



“My work fired me for not having childcare.”

Mother in Illinois

“My unemployment runs out soon but I don’t have childcare so I can’t get a new job.”

Mother in Massachusetts

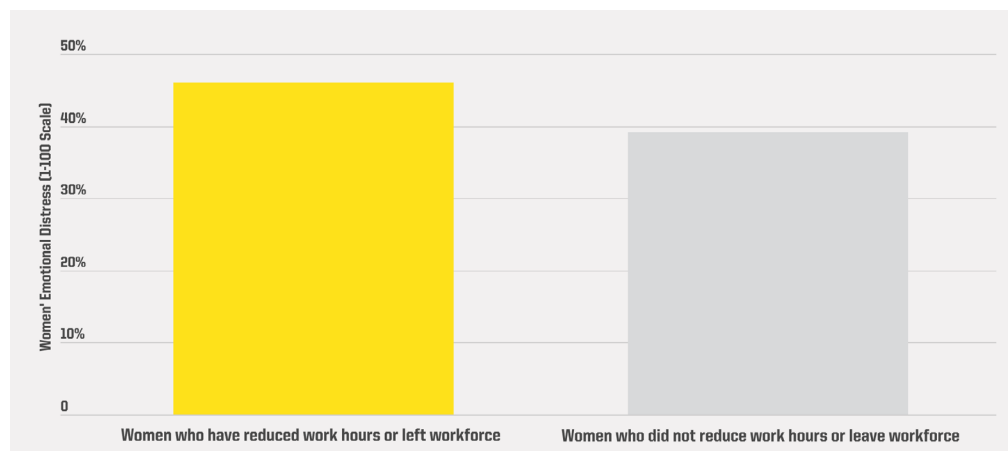
WOMEN'S EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING WAS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED WHEN THEY WERE FORCED TO STOP OR REDUCE WORK

- Women who were forced to stop or reduce work experienced significantly more emotional distress (measured through a composite score of anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness) than those whose work remained unchanged during the pandemic.
- Emotional distress levels were highest overall for women who were forced to stop/reduce work and couldn't afford to do so, and lowest overall for those who could afford to leave/reduce work but whose work remain unchanged.
- Notably, among women who reported that they could afford stopping/reducing work, those women who did stop/reduce work had significantly more emotional distress than those who did not stop/reduce work.

"My job just went from temporarily laid off to permanently laid off. We will lose all of our savings because of this. I'm not sure how to cut grocery bills even more for my family of four."

Mother in Indiana

Emotional distress based on changes in work status



"I am still potentially facing a layoff at my job (will not know until June). Even if I do not get laid off, due to changes to a number of things at work I will be making less money but required to do more work this year."

Mother in New Jersey

These data do not clarify the reasons why mothers who stop/reduce experience distress, but these reasons might include issues such as loss of opportunities for occupational advancement, decreased income, or loss of childcare.

We will be examining these issues in upcoming surveys.

Implications and conclusions

The pandemic has disproportionately affected women in the workforce, and our data show that this is also true for women in households with young children.

Overall, we found a third of women with young children were forced to stop/reduce work during the pandemic, even though most we surveyed said they couldn't afford to do so.

Black/Latinx women who were forced to stop/reduce work were significantly more likely to be unable to afford it, and these differences indicate structural inequalities based on race/ethnicity.

Overall, women who were forced to stop/reduce working had elevated levels of emotional distress. This was especially true of those who said they couldn't afford to do so but was still the case among those who said they could.

This finding is particularly noteworthy because it suggests that for mothers of young children, regardless of their income, not working or working less during the pandemic may be a stressor, and conversely that having a desired level of work may confer emotional benefits. We will be exploring these issues in greater detail in the future.

"It is difficult to do the two things at the same time. You still need somebody to take care of your child even if you are working from home. Little children need 24/7 supervision and it is difficult to do it while working."

Mother in New York

"My job has laid me off and I can't find another one. I need to work but it's just not feasible while doing remote learning and lack of affordable childcare."

Mother in Colorado



ABOUT THE RAPID-EC PROJECT

RAPID-EC is under the Direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center for Translational Neuroscience at the University of Oregon

The RAPID-EC project is an early childhood family well-being survey designed to gather essential information in a continuous manner regarding the needs, health promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families during the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery in the United States. The survey focuses on better understanding child development (and parents' concerns about development over time), caregiver mental health and well-being, and caregiver needs and utilization of resources.

RAPID-EC collects data from 1,000 caregivers in all 50 states twice per month. The survey collects snapshots of data across time with the ability to assess trends longitudinally.

Twice per month, the team posts analyses of survey findings, including policy recommendations and resources for additional reading.

1,000+

surveyed
bi-weekly

52

surveys

9,000+

unique
households

50

US states

