
Women, Work, and Family During COVID-19: Findings from the KFF Women's Health Survey

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FINDINGS

Key Takeaways

- One in ten women report quitting a job due to a pandemic related reason and almost half said that one of the reasons was because they felt unsafe at their workplace.
- School closures had a substantial effect on working mothers' ability to fulfill work obligations. One in ten working mothers with children under 18 said they quit a job due to COVID and half of this group cited school closures as one of the reasons. Three out of ten working mothers said they had to take time off because school or daycare was closed.
- In addition to juggling new, increased home and work responsibilities, many women went without pay due to school closures. Almost half (47%) of working mothers said they took unpaid sick leave because their child's school or daycare was closed. This rose to 65% among low-income mothers and 70% among those working part-time jobs.
- Family caregiving responsibilities before and after the pandemic have largely fallen on women. More than one in ten women report they were caring for a family member who needed special assistance prior to the pandemic. Over one in ten women report that they have new caregiving responsibilities as a result of the pandemic.
- Over half of mothers with school age children said that the stress and worry of the pandemic has affected their mental health, with one in five characterizing the impact as "major." However, only 16% of mothers have sought mental health care.

Given that the mental health effects are likely to persist for a long time, access to mental health care will be an important issue to watch, particularly for mothers.

Introduction

While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted people across the US, changing the way we work, live, and access health care, gender-based disparities that existed prior to the pandemic have been magnified. Many women have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 emergency, as essential workers, mothers, and caregivers. Lack of paid leave, family caregiving responsibilities, traditional gender roles, and health concerns have placed many of the burdens of the pandemic squarely on the shoulders of women, falling particularly hard on women of color and those who are low-income. This brief provides new data from the KFF Women's Health Survey, a nationally representative survey of 3,661 women and 1,144 men ages 18-64 (**Methodology** (<https://www.kff.org/report-section/women-work-and-family-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-kff-womens-health-survey-methodology>)) conducted November 19, 2020 – December 17, 2020. Among several topics related to women's health and well-being, we asked respondents about experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this brief, we highlight how experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic related to work, childcare, and caregiving differ by gender and among different subpopulations of women.

Nearly 1 in 10 women (8%) report quitting their job for a reason related to COVID-19. Larger shares are younger, Black or Hispanic,¹ (<https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/women-work-and-family-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-kff-womens-health-survey/view/footnotes/#footnote-516536-1>) uninsured, low-income, and have less than a Bachelor's degree (**Figure 1**). For example, 17% of low-income women had to quit a job for a COVID-related reason, compared to 5% with higher incomes.

Figure 1

Low-income women are three times more likely than higher income women to report quitting a job for a reason related to COVID-19

Since March 1, 2020, have you had to quit a job for any reason related to COVID-19, or not?

Gender

Women Overall	8%
Men Overall	8%

Age

18-25*	14%
26-35*	10%
36-49*	8%
50-64 (Ref)	5%

Race/ethnicity

Black*	11%
Hispanic*	11%
Asian	5%
White (Ref)	7%

Education

No high school diploma*	12%
High school grad or equivalent*	12%
Some college or Associate's degree*	9%
Bachelor's degree or higher (Ref)	5%

Insurance

Uninsured*	13%
Medicaid*	16%
Private insurance (Ref)	6%

Income

< 200% FPL*	17%
≥ 200% FPL (Ref)	5%

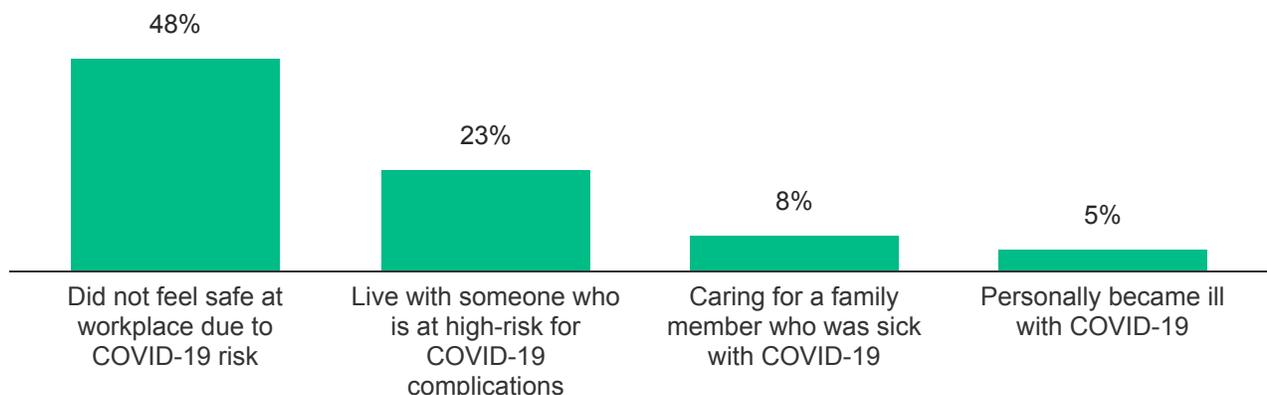
NOTE: *Estimate is statistically different than estimate for reference (Ref) within group ($p < 0.05$). Bars represent

Almost half of women who have quit a job for a reason related to COVID-19 (48%) say they quit because they did not feel safe at their workplace. Three in ten women (30%) quit their job due to COVID-19 because their child's school or daycare was closed (**Figure 2**). A larger share of women with Medicaid compared to women with private insurance (44% vs. 20%) and a larger share of low-income women compared to women with incomes \geq 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL)² (<https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/women-work-and-family-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-kff-womens-health-survey/view/footnotes/#footnote-516536-2>) (37% vs. 23%) say they had to quit their job because their child's school or daycare was closed, leaving the most disadvantaged with a loss of income. Nearly a quarter of women say they quit a job because they live with someone at elevated risk for COVID-19 complications.

Figure 2

Nearly half of women who have quit their job due to COVID-19 report not feeling safe at their workplace

Why did you quit your job? Please select all that apply.



NOTE: Respondents could select all that apply.

SOURCE: KFF Women's Health Survey 2020 • PNG

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Half of mothers who quit a job because of the pandemic said one of the reasons was because their child's school or daycare was closed. With in-person schools closed, mothers have taken on many new responsibilities, including even more childcare than usual, assisting with remote learning, and in some cases shifting to full homeschooling just to name a few. For mothers of young children who also work outside the home, they have been doing all of this while trying to maintain employment. While most mothers have been able to maintain their jobs, some with changes to their workload and schedules, it is not surprising that some have had to leave jobs as a result of school and daycare closures and the numerous

new responsibilities that mothers now carry. One in ten women with young children (11%) say they quit a job due to the pandemic (**Figure 3**). Among this group, half (51%) said one of the reasons was because their child's school or daycare was closed. Many mothers (42%) also said they quit because they did not feel safe at their workplace (**Figure 4**).

The share of women who report leaving a job is significantly higher among single mothers (17%) compared to those who are married or have partners (9%). Single mothers may face the double jeopardy of not having a partner to assist with childcare or another source of income, however. Almost one in five mothers who are not currently working (18%) report that they had to quit a job due to the pandemic, as do 7% of working mothers, suggesting that some mothers who had to quit a job during the pandemic have since found another one.

Figure 3

One in ten mothers reported quitting a job due to the pandemic

Share who reported quitting a job since March 1, 2020 due to a COVID-related reason:

Gender

Mothers	11%
Fathers (Ref)	8%

Partner status

Single mothers*	17%
Partnered mothers (Ref)	9%

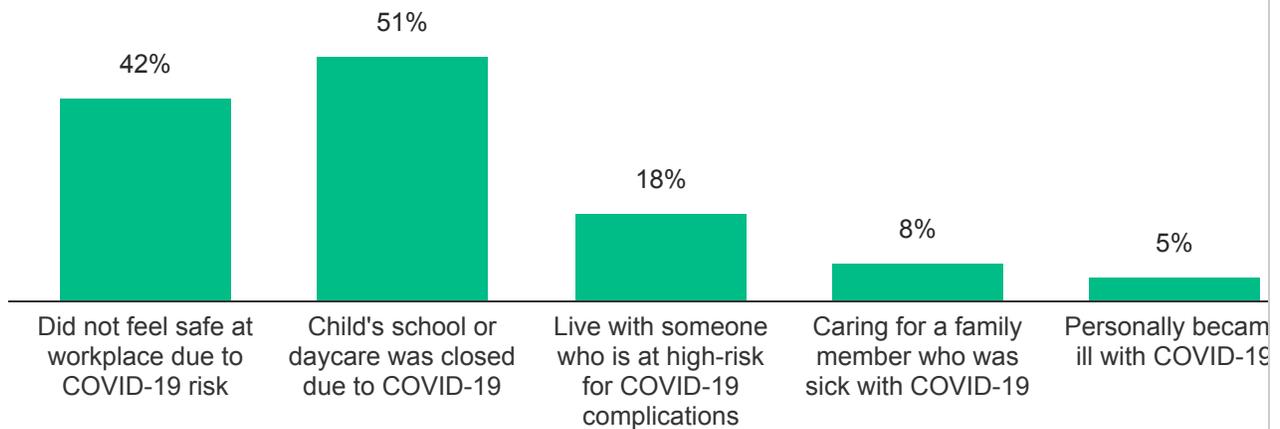
Current work status

Mothers not	18%
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Figure 4

Among mothers who quit a job due to COVID-19, half attribute it to school or daycare closure

Why did you quit your job? Please select all that apply.



NOTE: Respondents could select all that apply.

SOURCE: KFF Women's Health Survey 2020 • PNG



Mothers were more likely than fathers to miss work due to school and daycare closures. Many workers had to take time off due to the COVID pandemic, due to illness as well as school and daycare closures. The largest difference between women and men having to take time off work was because of school or daycare closure due to COVID-19 – this burden fell largely on women with school age children (30% vs. 20%) (**Table 1**). Low-income women were disproportionately affected, with almost four in ten (38%) taking time off because their child's school or daycare was closed compared to 27% of women with incomes $\geq 200\%$ FPL. Rates were similar among mothers of different racial and ethnic groups, except for Asian women, who were less likely to have taken time off because of school and daycare.

Table 1: Women are more likely than men to have taken time off work, especially for childcare reasons

Share of women reporting that they took time off work due to following reasons:

	I personally became ill with COVID-19 or was quarantining	I was caring for a family member who was sick with COVID-19 or quarantining	My child's school or daycare was closed due to COVID-19 [^]
Gender			
Women	12%	5%	30%*
Men (Ref)	11%	5%	20%
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	11%	6%	32%
Hispanic	14%	9%*	35%
Asian	9%	3%	13%*
White (Ref)	12%	4%	30%
Income			
<200% FPL	14%	6%	38%*
$\geq 200\%$ FPL (Ref)	12%	5%	27%

NOTE: All data presented are for women except for the row labeled "Men." [^]These percentages are among parents or guardians of children under age 18. *Estimates are statistically different from estimate in reference (Ref) group ($p < .05$). Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race, but are categorized as Hispanic, for this



In addition to bearing the brunt of childcare and caregiving responsibilities, many women lost pay during the pandemic because they missed work due to quarantining or school closures. Over one-third of women (35%) say they took *unpaid* sick leave when they became ill with COVID-19 or were quarantining, and nearly half of women (46%) say they took unpaid sick leave when their child's school or daycare was closed due to COVID-19 (Figure 5). Most employers offer some amount of

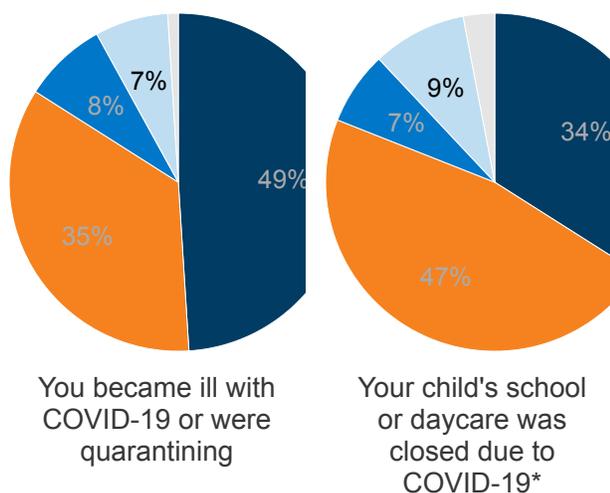
paid sick leave and the federal government provided support for emergency paid sick leave to some employers in 2020, but these benefits were not available (<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/gaps-in-emergency-paid-sick-leave-law-for-health-care-workers/>) to all workers and are time limited. Many women may not have been eligible for paid sick leave or may have taken more time off than available for pay at their workplace.

Figure 5

A substantial share of women have had to take unpaid sick leave because of COVID-19

Which of the following best describes your pay when you took time off work because:

- I took sick leave fully paid
- I took unpaid sick leave
- I took sick leave partially-paid
- I took some sick leave fully paid and some sick leave partially-paid
- Skipped



NOTE: *These percentages are among parents or guardians of any children under the age of 18.

SOURCE: KFF Women's Health Survey 2020 • PNG

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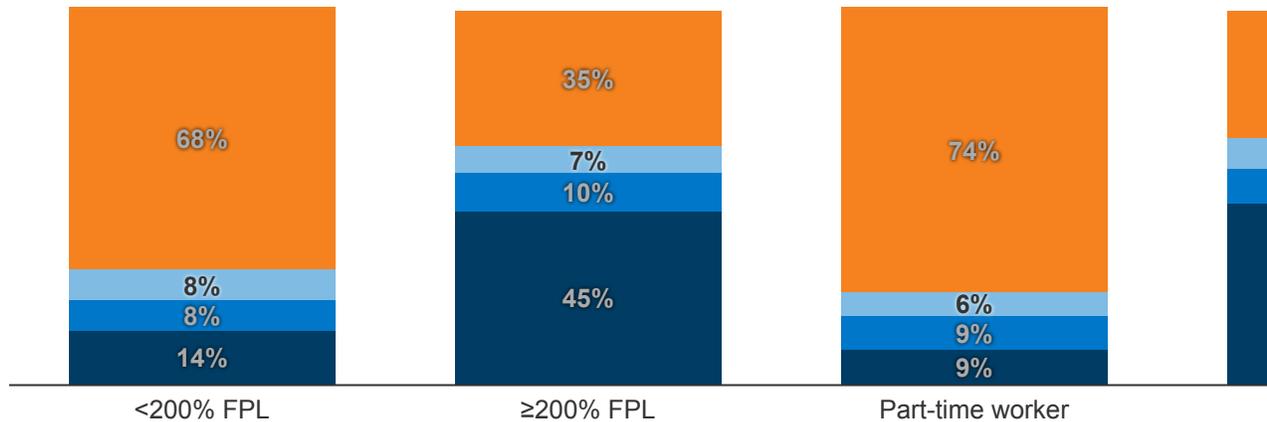
Over two-thirds of working mothers who were low-income and nearly three in four working part-time jobs were not paid when they had to take time off because their child's school or daycare was closed due to the pandemic. Lack of a national paid leave policy disproportionately affects women, who are more likely than men to have to take time off work for childcare reasons, and some women are particularly affected. Part-time and low-wage jobs are less likely to offer (<https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/coronavirus-puts-a-spotlight-on-paid-leave-policies/>) paid leave benefits, as reflected in our survey. Most women in these jobs went without pay when they took time off due to school and daycare closures last year (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6

Most working mothers who are low-income or have part-time jobs did not get paid when they took time off due to school closures last year

Share of women reporting that when they took time off due to school or daycare closure, they:

Received full pay Took some sick leave fully paid and some sick leave partially-paid
Took sick leave partially-paid Took unpaid sick leave



NOTE: Estimates for fully paid and unpaid sick leave are statistically different between >200% FPL and <200% FPL and full-time worker and part-time worker, ($p < 0.05$). The federal poverty level (FPL) in 2020 was \$26,200 for a family of four. See [toolkit](#) for full question wording.

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Nearly half of employed women have worked outside their home during the pandemic. More than half of men (53%) and nearly half of women (46%) report that they are working in a location outside their home during the pandemic. At the outset of the pandemic, some companies shifted to telecommuting, but many workers do not have this option as some industries and jobs are not amenable to remote work. Working outside of the home during the pandemic is more common among women who are younger, have lower educational attainment, live in rural areas, and report lower incomes. For example, more than half of Hispanic women (53%) compared to 45% of White women, have worked outside their home. Conversely, half of Asian women workers (51%) say they are working from home (**Figure 7**). More than half of women residing in rural areas (58%) report working outside the home, compared to 44% of women in urban communities.

Figure 7

Women who are low-income or Hispanic are more likely to report working outside the home during the pandemic

Share of women workers reporting at the time of the survey where they are working from:

	Working in location outside of home	Working both from home and location outside of home	Working from home
Women Overall	46%	22%	32%
Age			
18-25 years*	55%	18%	26%
26-35 years	50%	19%	31%
36-49 years	38%	26%	35%
50-64 years (Ref)	46%	22%	31%
Race/ethnicity			
Black	47%	20%	31%
Hispanic*	53%	19%	27%
Asian*	29%	20%	51%
White (Ref)	45%	24%	31%
Income			
<200% FPL*	65%	13%	21%
≥200% FPL (Ref)	39%	25%	35%
Education			
No college degree*	60%	16%	23%
Bachelor's degree or higher (Ref)	28%	29%	42%

NOTE: *Estimate for working in location outside of home is statistically different than estimate for reference (Ref) within group ($p < 0.05$). Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race, but are categorized as Hispanic, for this analysis; other groups are non-Hispanic. The federal poverty level (FPL) in 2020 was \$26,200 for a family of four.



Family caregiving responsibilities before and after the pandemic have largely fallen on women. More than one in ten women report they were caring for a family member who needed special assistance prior to the pandemic. Over one in ten women report that they have new caregiving responsibilities as a result of the pandemic. A higher share of women (14%) than men (9%) say they were caring for a family member who needed special assistance prior to the pandemic. This gender difference in caregiving extends to *new* caregiving responsibilities due to reasons related to the pandemic (12% of women vs. 8% of men) (**Table 2**).

One in five women ages 50-64 say they were caring for a family member who needs special assistance prior to the pandemic, higher than women in their reproductive years (11%), but similar shares (12%) in both age groups report taking on new caregiving responsibilities as a result of the pandemic.

Women who are parents of a child younger than age 18 in their household are significantly more likely than women without children under 18 to have taken on new or additional responsibilities caring for a family member because of the pandemic (16% vs. 10%). The pattern is similar among men, with 15% of men with children under age 18 reporting they have taken on new caregiving due to the pandemic, compared to 5% of men without children. However, it is worth noting that some respondents, especially parents of young children, may have interpreted new and additional responsibilities caring for a family member or relative as homeschooling. Almost one in five low-income women (19%) were caregivers before the pandemic compared to 13% of higher-income women. Low-income women (15%) are also more likely than higher-income women (11%) to have gained new caregiving responsibilities as a result of the pandemic.

Family caregiving falls heavily on some women of color too. Almost one in five Black women (18%) report caring for someone who needed special assistance prior to the pandemic, significantly higher than the 12% of White women. Eighteen percent of Hispanic women say they have had to take on new caregiving responsibilities since the pandemic started. Nearly one in ten Hispanic women workers (9%) say they have had to take time off work because they were caring for a family member quarantining from or sick with COVID-19.

For some caregivers, the pandemic compounded existing responsibilities. Among women and men who were already caring for someone with special needs prior to March 1, 2020, many said they gained additional caregiving responsibilities as a result of the pandemic (44% and 37% respectively).

Table 2: Larger shares of women have had to take on caregiving responsibilities because of the COVID-19 pandemic

Share of people reporting that they:

	Cared for a family member or relative who needed special assistance, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic	Taken on new or additional responsibilities caring for a family member or relative due to the COVID-19 pandemic
Gender		
Women	14%*	12%*
Men (Ref)	9%	8%
Race/Ethnicity (Women)		
Black	18%*	11%
Hispanic	16%	18%*
Asian/Pacific Islander	17%	15%
White (Ref)	12%	11%
Parents of children under 18		
Women	13%	16%
Men (Ref)	11%	15%
Individuals without children under 18		
Women	14%*	10%*
Men (Ref)	9%	5%

Most mothers report the pandemic has taken a toll on their mental health. A majority of mothers of children under 18 (54%) say that worry or stress related to coronavirus has affected their mental health, significantly higher than men with children under 18 (35%) (**Table 3**). Three in four mothers characterize the impact as major or moderate, as do 55% of fathers. More than half of mothers who are employed (56%) say that pandemic-related stress and worry have affected their mental health, as do 50% of those who are not working. However, only 16% of mothers with children under 18 have sought mental health care, with a significant difference between those who are single (21%) and partnered (14%).

Table 3: A majority of mothers say that worry or stress related to coronavirus has affected their mental health and 1 in 5 say it has had a major impact on their mental health

	Share who said that worry or stress related to coronavirus affected their mental health	Among those who said that worry or stress affected their mental health, share who said impact was:		
		Major	Moderate	Minor
Parental Status				
Mothers	54%*	21%	53%*	26%*
Fathers (Ref)	35%	19%	36%	44%
Parent and Partner Status				
Single Mothers	57%	23%	61%*	15%*
Partnered Mother (Ref)	52%	19%	50%	30%
Parent and Work Status				
Mother who do not work for pay	50%	27%*	49%*	24%
Mothers				

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women in a number of ways. While many have had to put themselves and their families at risk to work on the frontlines as essential workers, a number of women have also had to take on new homeschooling and caregiving responsibilities that have placed additional burdens on their work or resulted in their leaving the workforce entirely. Disparities that existed prior to the pandemic have been magnified and a larger share of women of color and those who are low-income have had to quit their jobs, as well as take on additional caregiving responsibilities. As the nation begins to turn a corner on the pandemic, more schools are re-opening but many remain closed or with limited hours, still placing additional childcare burdens on parents and limiting the ability of many

mothers to work at the same level as pre-pandemic. Furthermore, as more businesses reopen, women's roles in the workplace will not necessarily be restored at the same pace. Some still have additional childcare responsibilities, some may be handling COVID-related illnesses for themselves or family members as well as the major mental health toll on women and their families. Some jobs may not be available anymore, some women had to scale back their workload and lost income, and many women will have missed out on career advancement opportunities. Policies such as paid leave and the child tax credit in the newly enacted federal stimulus bill can support women in caring for their families, obtaining needed health care and balancing work and family responsibilities in this unprecedented time.

[METHODODOLOGY \(HTTPS://WWW.KFF.ORG/REPORT-SECTION/WOMEN-WORK-AND-FAMILY-DURING-COVID-19-FINDINGS-FROM-THE-KFF-WOMENS-HEALTH-SURVEY-METHODODOLOGY/\)](https://www.kff.org/report-section/women-work-and-family-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-kff-womens-health-survey-methodology/) >

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