

## The COVID-19 Pandemic on Women's Employment: Impacts and Consequences

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**Abstract:** The current COVID-19 pandemic has caused substantial economic setbacks and subsequent recovery. When measured concerning past "recessions," the present crisis affects women's employment than men's employment, which is a far cry from the past outcomes. The current economic situation, brought about by the effects of movement restrictions and social distancing rules, affects sectors with a predominantly higher female workforce. Additionally, schools and daycare centers have been shut down. Therefore, many working mothers have been forced to leave their employment positions to attend to domestic work. This increased pressures and crisis faced by working mothers will likely persist, primarily due to the already persistent unequal labor and discrimination of women in the labor market. Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish policies that can reduce and redistribute domestic work by improving labor market regulations and making provisions for low-cost care services. There is a need to enact effective social care policies and workplace practices to reinvent the labor market, thereby leading to better opportunities and participation for men and women.

**Key Words:** COVID-19, Women's Employment, Challenges.

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## Introduction

Generally, every crisis is distinctive. Even when two countries experience the same catastrophe, the outcome is usually different. Similarly, every person's experience and opportunities will shape their individual identities. Subsequently, how events affect them, how they respond, and their support might require overcoming challenges in the present crisis. The COVID-19 confirms this postulation because it affects regions, countries, and individuals differently, even as it is a global crisis.

The COVID-19 has caused waves of languish - closed schools, shuttered markets, and most of the world population restricted to their homes. Still, millions of care and essential workers must continue to leave their homes to help people in need and earn meager wages. Women make up most care workers and work in positions such as laundry, sanitation, nursing home, community health, and nursing. These positions are mostly underpaid and undervalued and highlight the ironies of our present political climate that the least paid jobs determine the survival of systems, economies, and nations.

This paradox does not only exist at the macro-level but is equally the dynamics witnessed in our homes. The ILO (2018) found that women spend over 4.1 times doing unpaid care work, such as cooking, caring for others, cleaning, fetching wood and water, and men. Still, their immense contributions in such areas are mostly underpaid and undervalued. In many countries, some women spend as much as 11 times more than

their male counterparts on such chores (UN Women, 2018). Surprisingly, this aspect of the workforce, even as it remains “invisible,” brings to the global economy at least US\$10.8 trillion every year in both productive and reproductive work. Furthermore, systems, economies, and humanity largely depend on these contributions, but they remain largely ignored.

As the pandemic rages on, there is no doubt, this inequality within the labor market will worsen significantly. This is primarily because healthcare systems have become overburdened, and essential services such as primary healthcare, day-care centers, and schools remain closed. It is becoming quite clear that if the government does not make provisions for an adequate standard of living and social security in law and practice, these marginalized areas, including the female population providing care within and outside their homes, will be the most endangered. Combined, the COVID-19 will adversely affect women and their employment avenues. These effects will likely be felt long after the pandemic, according to sever, according to literature works when recessions usually bring about persistent loss of jobs and earnings (Stevens, 1997; Watcher, 2011).

Even so, Jarosh (2015) further observed that workers losing their jobs in the present situation would likely have even more insecure job positions in the future. Therefore, the current pandemic does not only cause the loss of employment but impact on their chances of a better life after the epidemic. These adverse effects will not only affect those in vulnerable job positions but those entering the labor market for the first time. However, despite the unfavorable outcomes, the COVID-19

crisis presents, there is even the potential to revolutionize the labor market and combat gender inequality.

However, it is worthy to note that unequal division household work is a principal factor causing gender inequality in the labor market. Currently, even as many industrialized nations have men and women's labor force participation as almost equal but, women still have to deal with a heavier burden in terms of domestic chores and child care.

Recent literature suggests that the gender pay gap can be primarily measured in childbirth relations, both pregnant and actual. From this standpoint, changes in social norms are the primary areas that should be focused on, if notable strides can be attained to combat gender equality effectively.

Nevertheless, history suggests that economic crisis affects women and men in different ways with higher adverse impacts witnessed by men (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013; Hoynes et al., 2012).

A notable example is the 2008 financial situation, which caused severe job losses, particularly in male-dominated job positions such as manufacturing and construction sectors. The working hours for women increased significantly. Recent studies also show that the present economic crisis caused similar effects on female and male employment because it affects sectors where both genders have jobs (Hupkau and Petrongolo, 2020, Alon et al., 2020; ILO, 2020). In truth, the present COVID-19 crisis causes enormous health, social, and economic crises.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 has caused severe outcomes and led to higher housework and childcare issues following daycare and schools' closure. Presently, many women struggle to balance their professional and personal lives, especially as there are higher pressures for one parent to remain at home and care for children (Queisser et al., 2020). However, some evidence from the UK and Spain show a shift towards equal household and childcare distributions between women and men. Nevertheless, the women still handle additional work brought on by the pandemic (Farré and Gonzalez, 2020; Sevilla and Smith, 2020).

In the current study, existing literature concerning women, men, couple's distribution amongst job positions, and time-use data on labor force distribution were used to gain insights into the many ways the COVID-19 pandemic impacts gender inequality. Nevertheless, even as there are seeming primary benefits, the short-run problems that the crisis causes are especially detrimental to mothers and families having the inability to combine work and caring for their home.

### **The COVID-19 on Women's Work, Domestic Work and Childcare**

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted millions of people around the globe in diverse ways. From mid-March till May, Turkey witnessed stay-at-home order and complete lockdowns during national celebrations and weekends. Following mid-May, there has been a gradual easing of restrictions. The present study uses a time-use pandemic survey conducted from

the 18th day of March to the 19th day of March, under absolute lockdown, with a "typical weekday" as a reference (UNDP, 2020).

According to the survey, the lockdown restrictions caused increments in unpaid workload for both males and females. This was further intensified by closed schools, higher demands for household consumption items, alongside household chores and care services. All of these put together increased household labor tremendously. In many cases, women bore the burden's brunt, shouldering as high as four times unpaid work than men. The total workload for women, combining paid and unpaid work, was also greater for females than their male counterparts. This is mostly because women in employment largely continued working at their workplaces, especially in essential services, while still putting in more unpaid work. These women equally spent longer hours (over 10 hours every day) in paid employment. Surprisingly, the survey equally revealed that the men also had higher unpaid work time. According to the survey, men in employment had five times more unpaid work than their regular activities before the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, this astonishing increase might drive the achievement of equal distribution of unpaid work amongst both genders.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that more men reported disruptions in their jobs during the pandemic than men. This higher concentration of women working might be because many of these women serve as essential workers. Nevertheless,

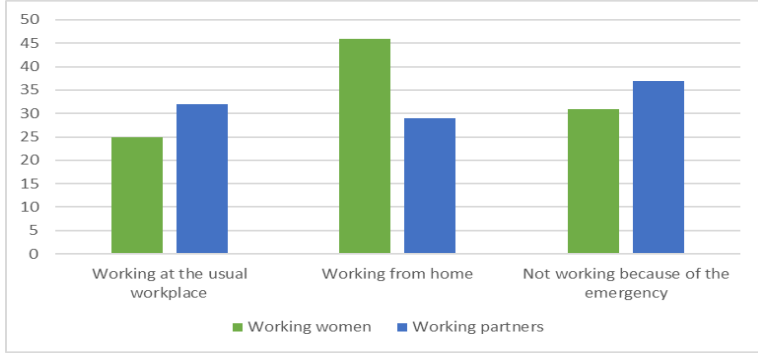
men have more chances of leaving with continued pay than women, who equally had higher chances of switching to remote work than men.

### **Employment and COVID-19 Pandemic**

Considering the effects of COVID-19 on employment, stay-at-home orders, and social distancing restrictions led to a rise in unemployment. At the same time, many workers were asked to work shorter hours or temporarily laid off.

Figure 1 below shows the work placements for men and women during the COVID-19 crisis. In the first column, men are more likely to be kept within their current workplace than women, with over 33 percent for men than 23 percent for women. In the second column, only 30 percent of men have their jobs compared to 44% of working women who switched to working from home. Therefore, men are less likely to work from home than women, which further sheds insights on the fact that more women bear heavier work burdens, combining their professional and domestic work. In the last column, almost the same number of men and women, 37 percent and 33 percent respectively, have stopped working as consequences of the pandemic.

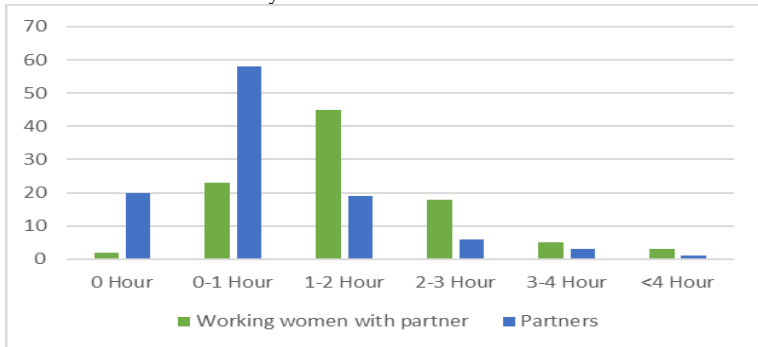
**Figure 1:** Percentage of Working Men and Women by Job Positions during the COVID-19 Crisis



Source: UNDP, 2020.

In the household scene, Figure 2 shows the amount of time spent on household work by men and women before the emergency. The figure illustrates that women spent a notably higher amount of time than their male counterparts. Furthermore, only 28 percent of women devoted less than one hour of their day to household activities as opposed to over 74 percent of men.

**Figure 2:** Percentage of Working Men and Women by Hours Spent on Household Tasks Per Day before the COVID-19 Pandemic.



Source: UNDP, 2020.

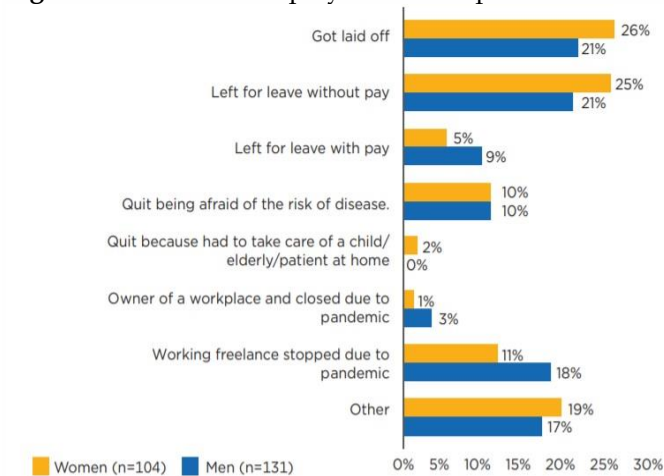
Due to the measures enacted to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus, there has been an increased amount of child-



care and household-related activities over the last two months. However, between couples, women bear the higher brunt of the burden. The survey was further used to evaluate work, household tasks, and childcare arrangements between couples.

The pandemic survey also shows considerable disruption in employment. Overall, more men (54 percent) reported employment issues than women (32 percent). Furthermore, when disruptions in employment are calculated as a share of those with jobs before the pandemic period, a surprising contrast emerged. Women (31 percent) had higher economic disruption risks than men (18 percent) before the pandemic period.

**Figure 3: Causes for Employment Disruption**



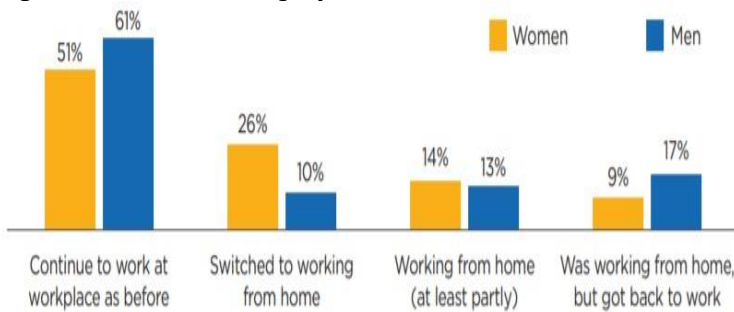
Source: UNDP, 2020.

In Figure 3, it is seen that over 26 percent of women were laid off, while 25 percent went on leave without pay, totaling over 50 percent of employed women in perilous positions. In contrast, 21 percent of men got laid off. At the same time, 21 percent were left without pay, totaling over 42 percent of men

in vulnerable positions. Subsequently, more men reported that they have closed their workplaces (3 percent and 18 percent respectively) or stopped working in freelancing positions than women (1 percent and 11 percent respectively).

Other reasons for employment disruption reported include engagements in "agriculture/gardening work," employments being at "part-time," "irregular," or "temporary" job positions. Many in these positions were stopped because of the pandemic. Over 10 percent of men and women reported leaving their jobs because of their pre-existing medical conditions. A higher number of women (17 percent) within this group belong to extended households. About 2 percent of women also reported leaving their employment positions because they have to care for their children, patients, or elderly household members, compared to no men within this category. Across family types, this figure rose for women in three-generation or extended households (UNDP, 2020).

**Figure 4:** Continued Employment within Pandemic Conditions



Source: UNDP, 2020.

In sharp contrast, over 51 percent of women continued working in their traditional offices, which is lesser than 61 per-

cent of men still working in traditional positions. Furthermore, 9 percent of women and 17 percent of men reported shifting to working from home under the lockdown restrictions (mid-March) and subsequently returning to their traditional offices after the restrictions were lessened. However, only 10 percent of men continue working from home, so it is rare amongst men.

Men and women spend more time on domestic work during the COVID-19 restrictions. This is in line with Angelici and Profeta (2020)'s results, which stated that flexible working works, and changes in locations for work, led to more men participating in domestic work. Remarkably, this increase was witnessed on childcare than housework in most situations. However, additional work remained unbalanced within couples with women bearing the brunt of the extra work.

Subsequent regression analysis confirms a great imbalance in the volume of time women and men spent on family work, with higher margins for household activities than childcare. This analysis further showed that women with younger children aged zero to five had more challenging housework burdens. Therefore, women's work-life balance was more challenging to achieve than for their partners, who generally continued working outside the home during the restrictions. These outcomes will have long-lasting adverse effects, especially for women, if schools remain closed and the labor market crisis persists. Accordingly, past research shows that female participation in the labor market can only increase when male participation is witnessed in domestic activities, especially housework (Fanelli and Profeta, 2019). Thus, the present pandemic further

intensifies problems for the female labor market, primarily due to the unequal allocations of housework that the crisis creates.

### **Policy Implications**

The COVID-19's impact is more directly felt by women who are unable to work during the pandemic. Many women may likely stop working permanently. Women may also likely have shortened careers or lose their chances of vital promotions. Subsequently, women may have lower career opportunities, and the gender pay gap may also widen. Furthermore, the pandemic caused a drop-in women's employment, which further reduced some families' ability to seek relevant insurance against lost earnings. These families had no other options but to spend less on food or delay making significant purchases, including the inability to meet their rental obligations. Therefore, such drops in expenditures only intensify the recession's consequences and may lead to a slower recovery. Because more families are going without self-insurance, they do not receive income support payments (including expanded unemployment insurance). All of these are even more crucial to recovery. Moreover, it is equally impossible to achieve full recovery if schools remain closed because it prevents many parents from going back to their professional obligations.

Therefore, the COVID-19 crisis further heightens the need for transformative policies to reinvent unequal unpaid care work divisions. Suppose there are no measures or policies enacted to combat these issues. In that case, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will only worsen the already existing un-

equal gender labor divisions, further intensifying time squeeze women's experience in employment. Subsequently, this will cause spillover adverse impacts on gender job segregation, women's labor force attachment, and gender earnings gap, making more households vulnerable to economic and healthcare crises. However, the increment in men's unpaid work time, especially in situations where some men work from home, suggests that there can be higher gender-equal sharing in terms of care and domestic work.

Combined, the findings of this study shed light on the need to enact policy interventions that will redistribute care work, using a two-pronged plan of attack; First, the need to make provisions for affordable and high-quality social care services not just for childcare, but equally for the ill, disabled, and elderly, alongside quality health and education services. These provisions will help service delivery systems become resilient to the impacts of the current and future crises. Secondly, there is a need to enact family-friendly policies and workplace practices in the labor market to make provisions for higher work-life balance for men and women with care dependents. Some policies that could be considered include elastic family-friendly work hours and dockets, telecommuting, and care leave. Nevertheless, to realize these policies, there is a need for fiscal expenditures within local and national segments. Therefore, there is a need to change the current budgeting approach to take heed of care work's vitality alongside a gender-responsive budgeting approach to ensure that the nation has a more effective strategy geared towards recovery.

In conclusion, more men and women work within the frontlines and essential care positions within and outside their homes. They must be protected, and their works recognized as they are critical to surviving the present crisis. Subsequently, the drive to rebuilt societies and economies rests on the ability to reduce, redistribute, and represent care work accurately once and for all.

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