

Childcare, Homeschooling Cause Strain for Utah Women During Pandemic

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A publication from the National Women's Law Center reported that during the pandemic, women dropped out of the workforce at four times the rate of men. Utah has seen similar patterns, and a recent study from the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) found that the majority of Utah women who left the workforce did so because of the weight they carried for childcare and homeschooling responsibilities during the pandemic.

The UWLP online survey was conducted in January in conjunction with Utah State University Extension and was completed by 3,542 Utah women age 20 or older who were either currently employed or unemployed due to the pandemic. The study was completed in both English and Spanish and the results are summarized in the third of a series of related reports to be released in upcoming months.

According to Susan Madsen, founding director of the UWLP, endowed professor of leadership in USU's Huntsman School of Business and one of three authors, participants reported overall that they felt the pandemic was harder on mothers than fathers when it came to managing home and work responsibilities.

A recent McKinsey and Lean In study supports that finding, stating that in dual-income households, mothers were three times more likely than fathers to bear the majority of the responsibility for housework and childcare.

"Though all women expressed these concerns, single mothers agreed more strongly that their burnout increased during the pandemic, that childcare concerns were a major

stressor, that their physical and mental health declined, and they experienced greater concerns regarding access to adequate internet and devices for online schooling," Madsen said.

The study found that concerns over childcare were less prevalent for women with older children, but adequate resources for internet and other online schooling needs became more prevalent for them.

In terms of workplace culture, working women with children noted they worry more about being judged negatively for having to balance work and home responsibilities.

"Many women seemed less likely to feel comfortable sharing work-life challenges and more likely to consider leaving their job, which is unfortunate, because women need that mental and emotional support from those around them," Madsen said.

Researchers for the study noted three actions that can help with a more equitable recovery for Utah women in the workforce. First, partners who are present in the home can help by sharing household and childcare responsibilities. Second, employers can foster an inclusive environment and initiate communication with employees to understand their challenges and provide adequate support and reasonable accommodations where needed. Finally, state and local governments can implement policies that support positive changes in terms of childcare, flexible work arrangements, family leave policies, gender pay gap and career relaunching programs.

"As Utah leaders and residents do more to understand the physical, behavioral and emotional effects that Utah women have faced related to COVID-19, a more equitable recovery can be crafted," said Madsen. "This will, in turn, strengthen our businesses, communities and the state as a whole."

Additional authors for the study are Chris Hartwell, associate professor of management, and Jared Hansen, associate professor of marketing, both from the USU Huntsman School of Business.

The online survey included information from Utah women from varying demographics and situations including age, education, race, marital status, socioeconomic status, county, job type, industry, hours worked per week, employment status and workplace situation. The full study can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/739v7b8s>. Further information about the UWLP can be found at utwomen.org.

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