

COVID-19 Has Negative Impact on Women's Career Advancement

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In a recent women's study conducted by the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP), 59.1% of respondents stated that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their career advancement opportunities. The online survey was conducted in conjunction with Utah State University Extension in January 2021 in both English and Spanish and included Utah women age 20 or older who were either currently employed or unemployed due to the pandemic. The study is the second in a series of related reports to be released in upcoming months.

Data was collected for the study from 2,564 survey participants who responded to the open-ended question, "How has the pandemic impacted your career advancement experiences and opportunities over the short term and longer term?" Thousands of comments were shared, and the responses were coded and analyzed, with four primary areas emerging: 1) everything is on hold, 2) lost or relinquished opportunity, 3) reevaluation of career and 4) experiences by various characteristics.

"Although some of these effects are likely not gender specific and could have been experienced by anyone, we know from national research that women are more likely to be in industries negatively affected by the pandemic and also more likely to have made career sacrifices to focus on caregiving responsibilities," said Susan Madsen, founding director of the UWLP, endowed professor of leadership in USU's Huntsman School of Business and researcher for the project.

"If you generalize even a little bit, this shows that at least tens of thousands of women across Utah have had their careers negatively impacted," she said. "We all – including business leaders, legislators, community leaders and the general population – need to understand how profoundly Utah women have been impacted by the pandemic. It has extensively changed their work lives."

Survey respondents stated their concerns about missing out on pay raises, declining promotions, fear of looking for a better fit, and reevaluating their current career, mostly due to unsupportive employers and being employed in particularly affected industries. Other women faced more severe effects such as job loss and having to completely restart their careers.

Marin Christensen, team lead for the study, said many respondents expressed how the pandemic overwhelmed them to the detriment of both their mental health and career advancement.

"Covid has not changed [career advancement] for me. Caregiving has," said one respondent.

"A component of the gender wage gap for women is career offboarding to care for children, and the pandemic will only serve to widen that gap," Christensen said. "This report illustrates, in their own words, the impact the pandemic had on opportunities to advance their career. Many women couldn't consider offered promotions or other opportunities of securing a more financially stable future because of increased responsibilities at home and also general burnout. Many felt this could set them back for years."

Christensen said an additional component is that women are more likely to work in careers and jobs most affected by the pandemic.

"A more robust support system could have prevented the tough decisions women had to make about their careers and could have set women – and their families – up for speedier recovery," she said. "In the future, it's important that we provide this support for women through better access to affordable, quality child care, sufficient paid leave and schedule flexibility."

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/c2wv3a3u>. Further information about the UWLP can be found at utwomen.org. Contact: Susan Madsen, Susan.Madsen@usu.edu

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