

## "Female recession" threatens women's advancement

As we contemplate women's career advancement amid the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence is mounting that we are facing a "female recession", where women are at significantly increased risk for dropping out of the workforce and the gender gap in the workplace is likely to grow. The current crisis threatens to roll back gains for women, particularly working mothers and women of color.<sup>1</sup>

- In September 2020, **four times more women than men dropped out of the workforce** with unemployment rates for Black (11.1%) and Latina (11.0%) women higher compared to the average (7.9%).<sup>2</sup>
- Prior to 2020 men and women were leaving their companies at comparable rates; now **women are 1.3 times more likely than men to have considered stepping out of the workforce or slowing down their careers**—particularly mothers, senior women, and Black women.<sup>3</sup>
- The participation gap between men and women ages 25-54 is widening after "shrinking to the narrowest ever" right before the virus.<sup>1</sup>
- A National Bureau of Economic Research working paper predicts that the **wage gap could widen more than 5 percentage points** after a pandemic recession and McKinsey expects that **global GDP could be \$1 trillion less in 2030** if nothing new is done to address the regressive effects of COVID-19 on women's employment.<sup>4, 5</sup>

## Women sustain deeper job losses and increased responsibilities for unpaid work

In the US, women comprised 47% of the workforce prior to COVID-19, yet they sustained **55% of the job losses** due to COVID-19, in part because they were overrepresented in occupations and sectors hit especially hard during the pandemic, such as accommodation, food, sales and manufacturing.<sup>6</sup>

Women are also dropping out of the labor force due to growing responsibilities of unpaid work at home, including the newly added responsibility for homeschooling children.

- Mothers are three times as likely as fathers to take on the majority of housework and caregiving during the pandemic. Hardest hit are mothers of young children in dual-career couples; they are **twice as likely as men to spend more than five additional hours per day on household responsibilities** due to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>
- Women are twice as likely to be primarily responsible for their children's homeschooling.<sup>7</sup>
- Over 80% of U.S. adults, who were not working because they were providing care for children not in school or daycare, were women.<sup>8</sup>
- Over the course of the first 12 weeks of the pandemic, the number of mothers ages 25-44 not working due to COVID-related child care issues increased 4.8% compared to no increase among men.<sup>9</sup>

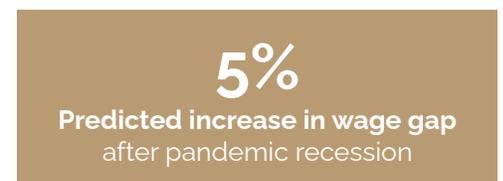
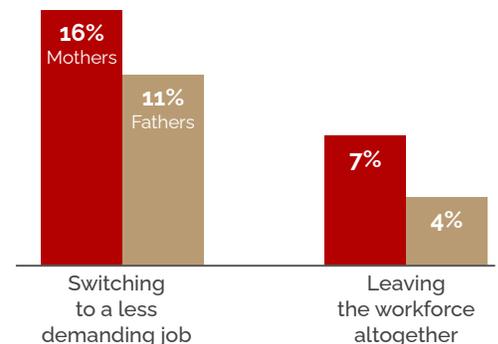
<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg <sup>2</sup> National Women's Law Center <sup>3</sup> Women in the Workplace 2020 Report and blog <sup>4</sup> NBER <sup>5</sup> McKinsey <sup>6</sup> Catalyst 8/20 <sup>7</sup> Catalyst 7/20 <sup>8</sup> Lerner Center <sup>9</sup> US Census Bureau <sup>10</sup> Qualtrics, theBoardlist.

*"This is an emergency for corporate America. Companies risk losing women in leadership—and future women leaders—and unwinding years of painstaking progress toward gender diversity."*

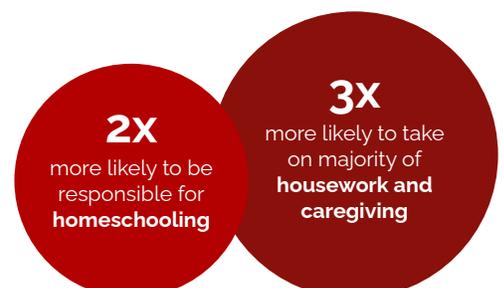
-Women in the Workplace 2020



Percentage of employees who have considered changing their work situation during the COVID-19 crisis<sup>3</sup>



Compared to fathers, mothers are...



## Men's careers are benefiting more from the shift to remote work, while women's stall

Women are more likely to report consistent feelings of burnout and exhaustion, lower productivity, and a negative impact of working remotely on their career progression. Conversely, men's careers are benefiting in many ways from working from home during the pandemic, according to a new study.

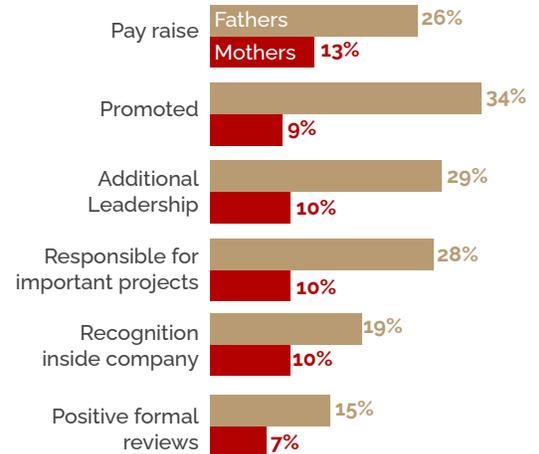
- Senior-level women are more likely than all other groups to feel burned out and under pressure to work more; **3 in 4 cite burnout as the primary reason for downshifting or leaving the workforce.**<sup>3</sup>
- In a study of more than 1,000 US adults, **men with children at home** are much more likely than women with children at home to report **positive impacts of working remotely on their career, including promotions, pay raises and additional leadership roles.**<sup>10</sup>

## Implications for employers and women's advancement programs

As the COVID-19 crisis wears on, employers must use a multi-pronged approach to supporting women in order to discourage them from stepping back or leaving the workforce.

- **Redouble focus on mitigating gender bias.** For working mothers, having their childcare responsibilities more visible to their colleagues and supervisors may heighten existing biases. If these biases are not actively countered, the blurred boundaries between work and home life may exacerbate the effects of the "motherhood penalty."
- **Recalibrate productivity and performance expectations.** Make sure these are sensible and feasible under the current crisis and are communicated clearly. According to McKinsey, less than one third of companies have adjusted performance review criteria during COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>
- **Adapt leadership development and training programs.** While the delivery methods for leadership development programs must adapt to the new realities of working from home, now is not the time to put a moratorium on these. Opportunities for sponsorship, mentoring, and networking both inside and outside the organization must be intentionally crafted rather than left up to chance.
- **Re-think workplace norms around flexibility and mental health.** Check in frequently with employees to understand the challenges they are facing — particularly mothers of young children, senior women, and women of color, who are most at risk for burnout — and work hard to promote flexibility and mental well-being. This may include flexible start and stop times, additional time off for self-care or caregiving responsibilities, and backup child care or tutoring services to support remote learning.

Percentage of parents with positive results of working from home<sup>10</sup>



### Supporting Caregivers

#### BC Center for Work & Family Members in Action

—  
Developing microsites to centralize information around existing benefits and resources for working parents,  
—

Extending parental leave to all caregivers of school age children, children with special needs or the elderly  
—

Increasing reimbursement for crisis care  
—

Training managers on empathy and support for caregivers  
—

Promoting networking and information sharing through intranet boards, social media groups, virtual gatherings and parent/women's ERGs.

*"Leadership is empathetic to the concerns here for working parents and women. However, we are also still managing a recovering business. Finding solutions that support both has been challenging."*

— BCCWF Member