

Working women and the early COVID-19 shutdowns

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Economic shutdowns and the resulting job losses and unemployment due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) have been widely reported. How have these job losses affected working women? What can we say about which women were affected? What are the long-term effects likely to be?

In [“Women take a bigger hit in the first wave of job losses due to COVID-19,”](#) (*kcFed Economic Bulletin*, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, April 16, 2020), authors Didem Tuzemen and Thao Tran use data from the Current Employment Statistics survey (the “establishment” survey of employers) and the Current Population Survey (the “household” survey) to get an idea of how working women were affected by COVID-19 during the first month of pandemic-related shutdowns.

Nonfarm payroll employment (reported by the establishment survey) declined by over 700,000 in March 2020. This employment decrease was the largest since the 2007–09 recession, although it was only a fraction of the job losses that would come in April. The March decrease in employment was concentrated in three industries: leisure and hospitality, education and health services, and retail trade.

Women held less than half of all jobs (in all industries) in the United States in March 2020. But more than half of the job losses in that month, the first wave of job losses resulting from COVID-19, were jobs that women held. Using data from the household survey, the authors find that the women without a college degree make up a large portion of the employment in the industries most affected by the early COVID-19 shutdowns.

Looking at data from state unemployment insurance programs, the authors determine that job losses due to COVID-19 continued to be concentrated in the same industries beyond the cut-off date for inclusion in the establishment and household survey data. (These data do not include unemployment insurance data in the calculation of their national employment and unemployment statistics.)

The authors close by stating that even though employment of women, especially college-educated women, was notable during the years of the recovery after the most recent recession (but before the pandemic), women, and particularly women without college degrees, have suffered the brunt of the job losses in the first wave of pandemic-related shutdowns. These job losses could be a harbinger of lower levels of employment and labor market activity for women.