

# Has COVID-19 affected mothers' labor market outcomes?

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The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has posed several challenges to parents continuing to work while also taking care of children who are unable to attend school or daycare because of safety regulations. While some parents are able to stay with their children by working from home, many work in industries and occupations that require them to work away from home. Because of the duration of the pandemic, childcare concerns have caused some parents in single-parent and multiparent households to consider leaving the labor force, limiting the hours they work in their current jobs, or changing jobs to work in occupations that allow them to work from home.

In [“Did Covid-19 disproportionately affect mothers' labor market activity?”](#) authors Daniel Aaronson, Luoja Hu, and Aastha Rajan (*Chicago Fed Letter*, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, January 2021) argue that COVID-19 has adversely affected parents' labor force participation that has disproportionately affected working mothers. Aaronson and colleagues acknowledge that other studies have shown that COVID-19 has not substantially affected parents' labor force participation. However, their assessment of labor market activity of parents (ages 25 to 54) through fall 2020 shows that labor force participation of mothers was 0.6 percentage point lower in the spring and 0.3 percentage point lower in the fall than that of adults in the same age group without kids. This finding means that approximately 120,000 mothers left the labor force in spring 2020 and approximately 60,000 left in fall 2020. In analyzing the demographics of those mothers who chose to leave the labor force beginning in March 2020, the authors found that the negative affect was disproportionately experienced by Black, single, and noncollege-educated mothers, reflecting disparities in the broader labor market over the same period.

Aaronson, Hu, and Rajan note that, while they assert gender disparity in labor market activity during COVID-19, their findings are not consistent with a trend toward the convergence of men's and women's labor market activity in the United States. Although the authors do not discuss the reasons why a gender disparity in labor market activity exists during COVID-19, they suggest that the disparity may be attributed to a higher proportion of women working in service industries, such as leisure and hospitality, that have been drastically affected by COVID-19. Another reason may be that mothers are still predominantly viewed as primary caregivers and more likely to be affected by the absence of children from schools and childcare. The impact on primary caregivers has been further complicated by the duration of the pandemic and safety concerns that have made relying on extended family for assistance more difficult. Regardless, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor market activity going forward remains to be seen.