

## IWPR WOMEN'S PRIORITIES AND ECONOMIC IMPACT SURVEY

**NEW POLL: As economic hardship for women and families persist, women say healthcare, the economic recession and jobs must be top priorities for Biden Administration and Congress**

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As President Biden sprints toward the 100-day mark, a new survey shows that women believe the new Administration and Congress should focus on healthcare, getting the economy under control and job creation. Their top priorities are highly influenced by their experience during the pandemic and the economic downturn.

Women have been most affected by the COVID-fueled economic downturn. Employed in the hardest-hit sectors — education, hospitality and leisure, healthcare, and service — more 4.3 million women have lost their jobs and another 2.35 million have left the workforce since February 2020 due to caretaking demands or an inability to find work.

Black and Latina women have been disproportionately affected. In April 2020, at the height of the pandemic, the unemployment rate for Black and Latina women was 16.4 percent and 20.2 percent, respectively (Hegewisch, Barsi, and Hayes 2020).

**In February 2021 IWPR surveyed 1,452 women to ask about their current economic concerns and their opinions on policy priorities for the new Administration and Congress to enact that would support them as workers and family providers.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Surveys were conducted February 2-11, 2021 using Qualtrics' online panel. IWPR oversampled Black and Latina women and the data have been weighted to population totals by race and ethnicity, age, household income, marital status, and region using data from the 2019 American Community Survey using a raking procedure to create post-stratification weights.

*This research was made possible with generous support from Pivotal Ventures, the Ford Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the JP Morgan Chase Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.*

## KEY FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS:

- One in four women (26.6 percent) report that their families are worse off financially than they were a year ago. Nearly three in ten (29.8 percent) of Latinas report that their family finances are worse off compared with the start of 2020.

Overall, almost one half of women are either “very worried” (23.7 percent) or “somewhat worried” (24.0 percent) about their total family income being enough to pay all their bills. Concern is much higher among Latina women with two out of three (66.6 percent) women reporting worry about having enough income to meet family expenses.

- One in four women (25.2 percent) report that during the pandemic they needed to take time off from work but did not. Rates were highest among Latinas and Black women. About half (49.6 percent) of Latinas report that during the pandemic there has been at least one occasion where they needed to take leave from work, but they did not.
- Since the start of the pandemic, 40 percent of women said they stopped working or reduced their hours because of care-taking demands.
- Across race and ethnicity, 69 percent of women surveyed support paid sick and time away from work to have a child, recover from serious health conditions, or to care for a family member.
- About 20 percent of women with children want to see the new President and Congress address childcare and education in their first 100 days.

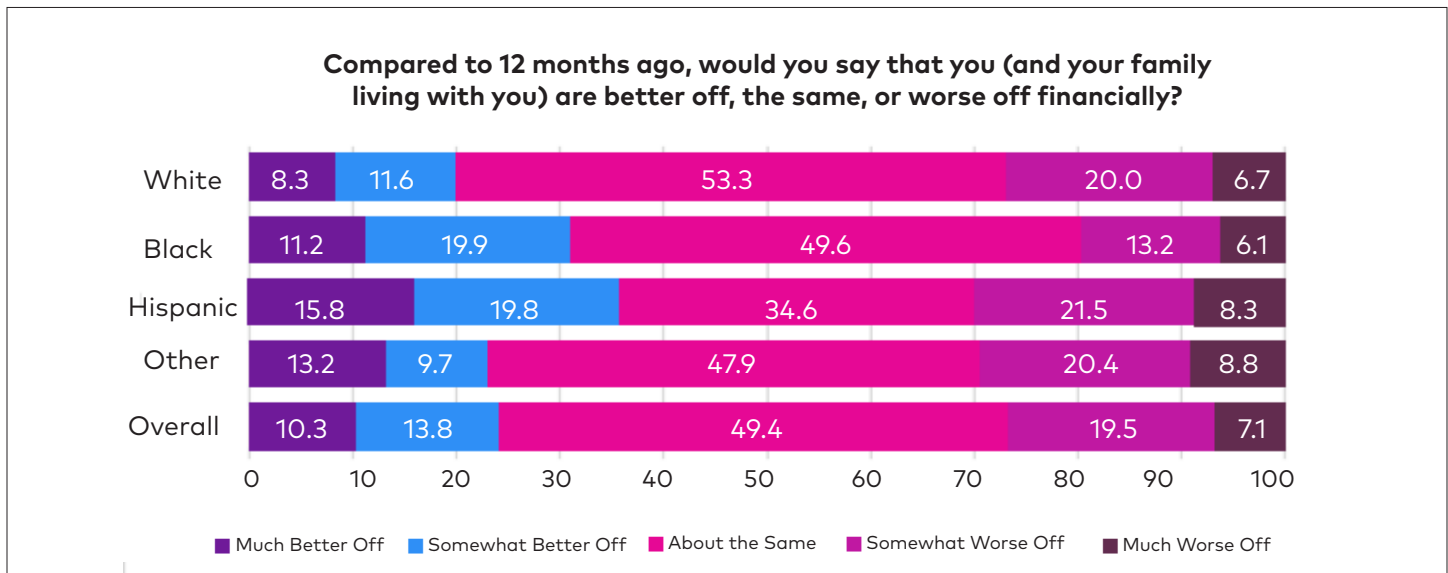
## WOMEN POLICY PRIORITIES FOR BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS

- **Healthcare is First on the List of Priorities for Women:** Nearly a year into the pandemic, close to 50 percent of women ranked affordable, high-quality healthcare as the number one priority for the Biden Administration, followed closely by the economic recession (40.5 percent) and Unemployment (35.8 percent).
- **Improving Economic Conditions:** Women are looking for policies and solutions aimed at improving their economic conditions and to alleviate the suffering caused by the COVID-fueled economic recession: 40.5 percent of women surveyed said rebuilding the economy was among their top five priorities along with stemming unemployment (35.8 percent) triggered by stay-at-home orders and efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19.
- **Racial Justice or Inequality:** Black women are looking for policies aimed at improving Racial Justice or Inequality (their most mentioned priority -- 49.1 percent) and Income Inequality (30.4 percent of Black women included in their top five priorities). Among white women, only about quarter believed racial justice or inequality to be a high-ranking priority. 1 in 4 of Latino women want racial justice or inequality to be a priority.
- **Raising the Minimum Wage:** Raising the minimum wage is a key issue for Black and Latino women. Black (39.1 percent) and Latina women (26.9 percent) would like to see an increase in the federal minimum wage. Both groups are over-represented among women workers in lower-wage jobs and occupations.
- **Taxes** rounded out the list of top priorities for women with 28.4 percent identifying it as a top issue. Among women surveyed, Latina women and White women were more likely to see taxes as a key priority, 34.4 percent and 29 percent, respectively. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Childcare Tax Credit are important issues for working women and families.

## ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR WOMEN

### One in Four Women Reports That Their Families Are Worse Off Than 12 Months Ago – Before the Pandemic

The pandemic's threats to family economic security are substantial and widespread. One in four women (26.6 percent) report that their families are worse off financially than they were a year ago. Nearly three in ten (29.8 percent) of Latinas report that their family finances are worse off compared with the start of 2020. Many women report that their family finances are better off possibly as a result of robust relief packages that were passed although many of their provisions have expired (as of Feb. 2021) and more that were extended expire in March 2021 raising concern for the future unless a bold package is enacted.



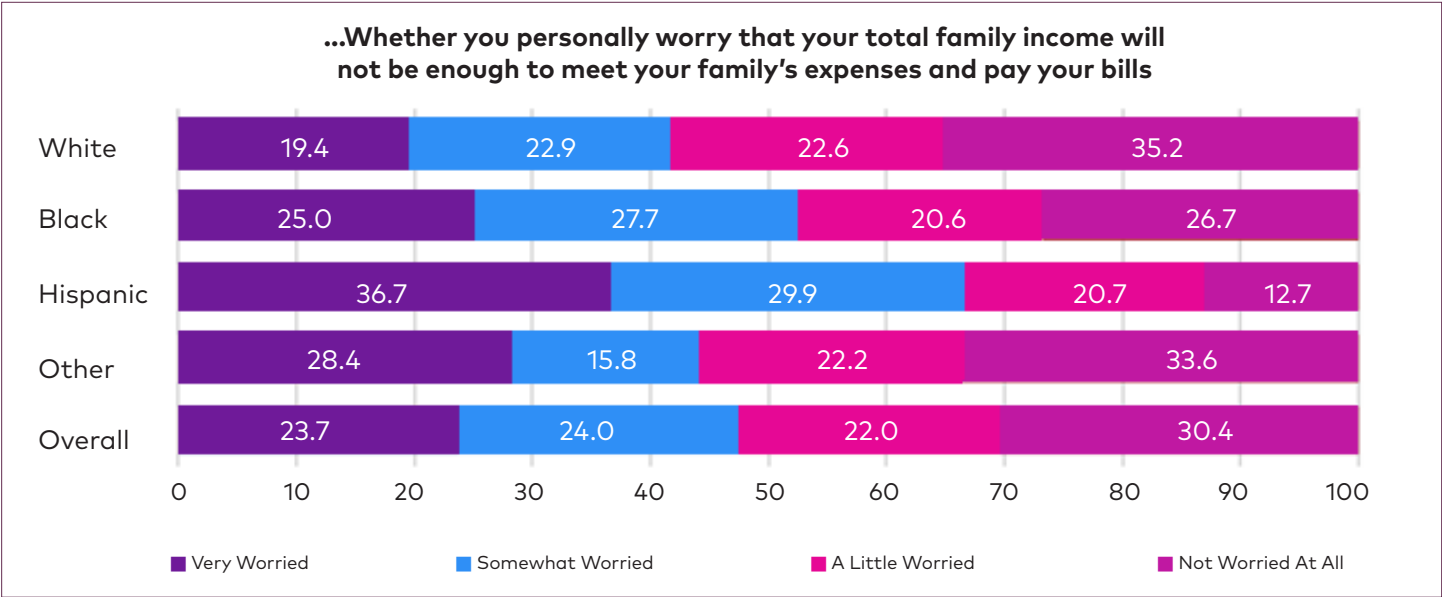
Source: IWPR Women's Priorities and Pandemic Economic Impact Survey collected February 2-11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

## FOUR OUT OF TEN WOMEN ARE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR ECONOMIC INSECURITY

### Economic insecurity is especially high for Latinas

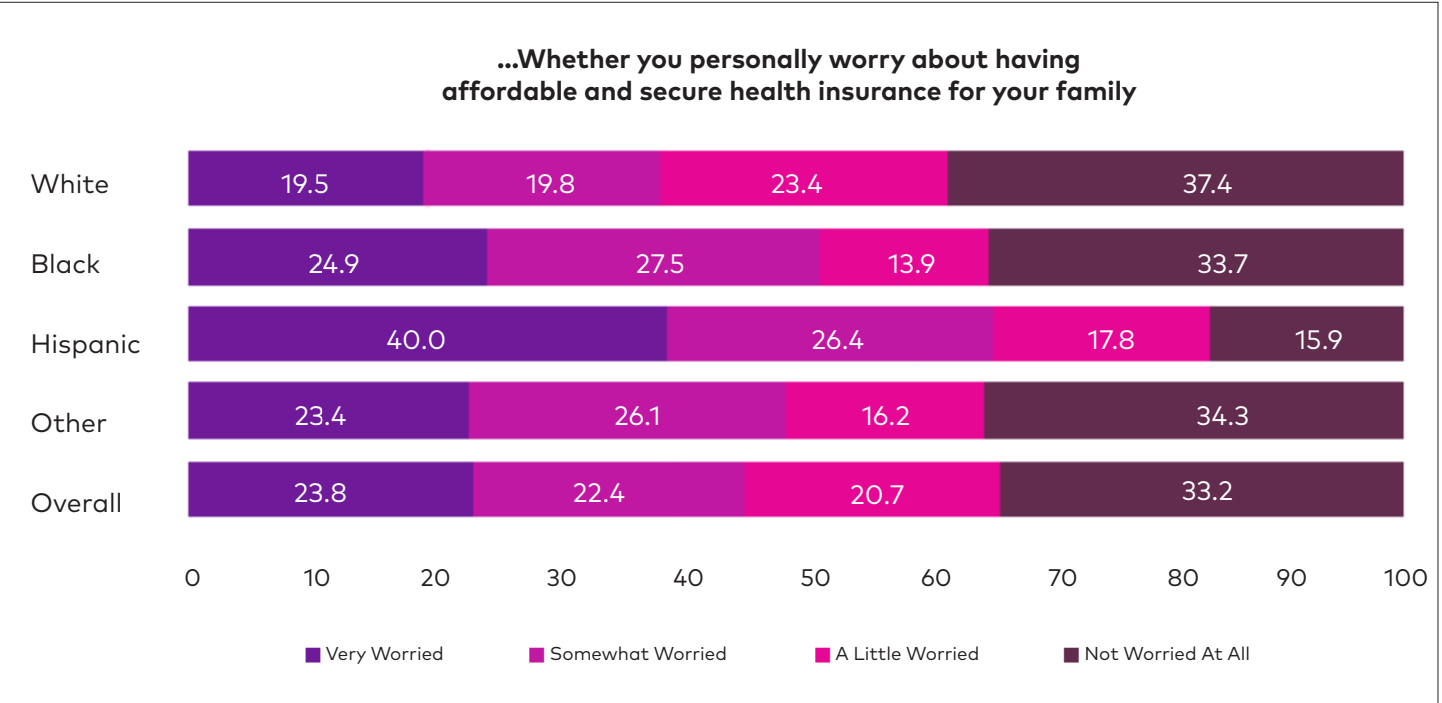
Overall almost one half of women are "very worried" (23.7 percent) or "somewhat worried" (24.0 percent) about their total family income being enough to pay all their bills. Concern is much higher with two out of three (66.6 percent) of Latinas reporting worry about having enough income to meet family expenses. While economic insecurity is lowest among white women, only one in three (35.2 percent) report not being worried at all about their family finances.





Source: IWPR Women's Priorities and Pandemic Economic Impact Survey collected February 2-11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

The picture is similar for women's concerns for their ability to maintain affordable and secure health insurance for their families. Overall, 46.2 percent of women report being worried about maintaining health insurance coverage for their families. Again, this worry is higher among Latinas (66.4 percent) who may lack access for obtaining insurance through existing public programs including CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, among immigrant subgroups.



Source: IWPR Women's Priorities and Economic Impact Survey collected February 2-11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women's Policy Research.



## WOMEN'S PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS

Women's top policy priorities are shaped by the experiences during the Pandemic. The top five priorities for women are: Healthcare, the economic recession, unemployment, racial justice or inequality, and taxes.

### What issues you would like to see the new President and Congress address in their First 100 Days after taking office?

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Overall
Healthcare	50.5	47.9	39.7	58.7	49.2
Economic Recession	47.8	26.9	25.4	35.1	40.5
Unemployment	37.1	31.1	31.5	40.6	35.8
Racial Justice or Inequality	25.7	49.1	20.8	42.9	29.4
Taxes	29.2	17.9	34.4	27.2	28.4
Raising the Federal Minimum Wage	23.9	39.1	26.9	18.0	25.8
Job Creation	27.6	10.0	18.0	21.3	23.3
Income Inequality	17.2	30.4	24.7	21.2	20.4
Gun Control	16.9	27.4	15.9	35.3	19.7
Housing	15.2	23.3	24.5	25.3	18.6
Student Loan Debt	14.8	26.2	22.0	14.3	17.3
Education	17.1	16.9	18.4	11.2	16.7
Paid Sick Leave	15.3	12.5	13.5	18.5	15.0
Low-cost or Free Higher Education	11.7	19.3	10.6	11.9	12.5
Childcare	11.3	8.7	16.9	9.3	11.7
Voting Rights	10.2	7.6	16.3	13.8	11.2
Top 5 in each column highlighted					

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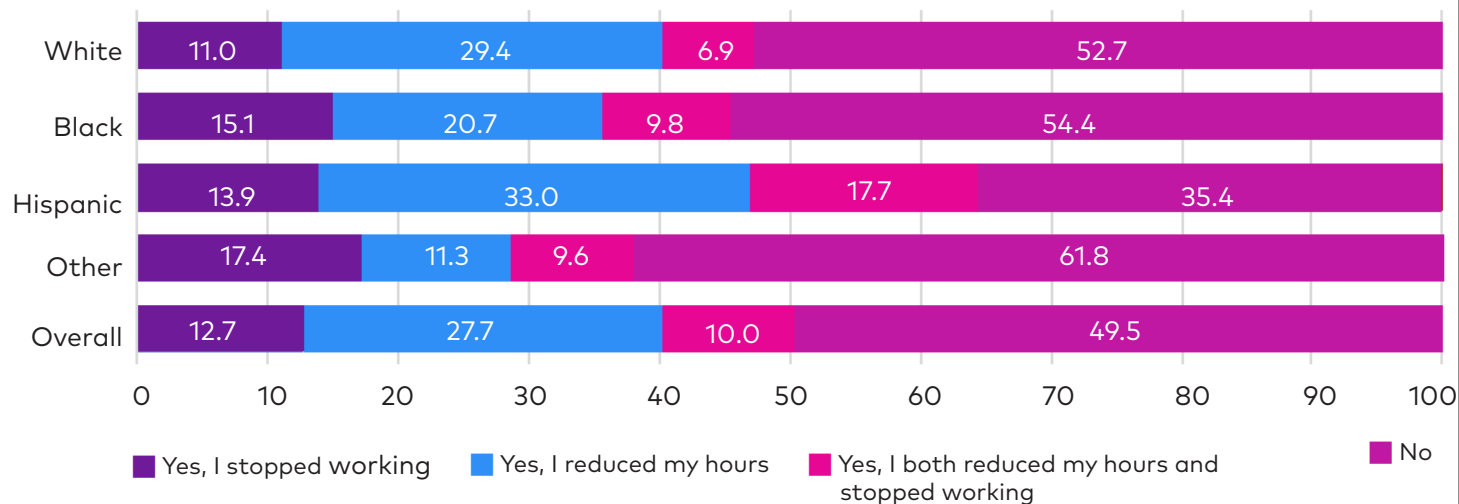
**Education and Childcare:** Women's ability to re-enter the workforce and sustain employment will depend on schools and daycares re-opening safely. Since the start of the pandemic, 50.4 percent of women said they stopped working or reduced their hours because of care-taking demands.

In the survey, education (16.7 percent overall) and childcare (11.7 percent overall), are viewed as priorities more frequently by women with children under age 18.

- 23.6 percent of women with children compared to 12.5 percent of women without children want to see the new president and congress address education in their first 100 days.
- 20.7 percent of women with children compared to 6.2 percent of women without children want to see the new president and congress address childcare in their first 100 days.



**Since March 2020, did you stop working or reduce your hours to meet any child care needs even for a short period of time?**



Source: IWPR Women’s Priorities and Economic Impact Survey collected February 2-11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

**HEALTHCARE AS A SHARED PRIORITY FOR WOMEN**

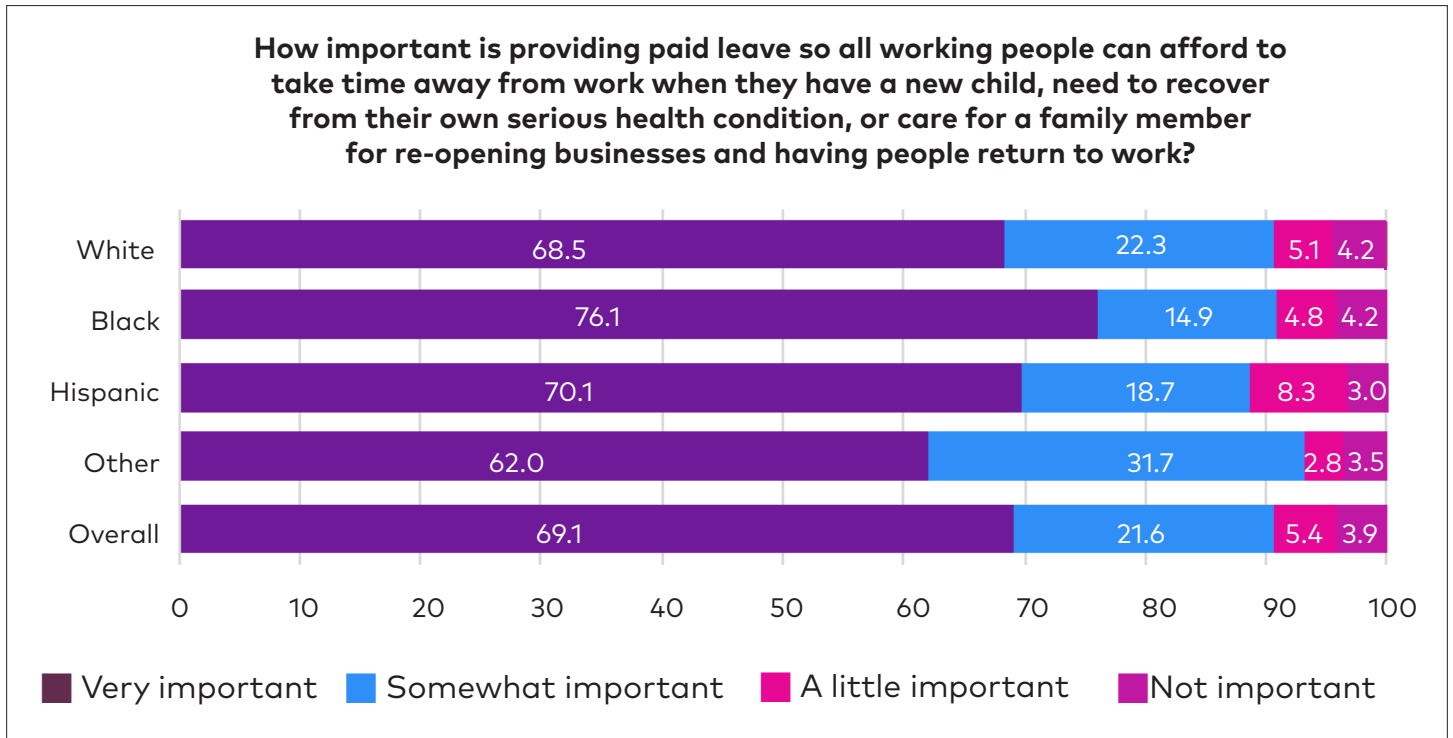
Affordable, high-quality healthcare was the most common shared priority reported and all groups of women included it in their top five issues. Women who responded understand that the COVID-19 pandemic is the root cause of the economic issues they are facing as workers and breadwinners.

**UNPAID & PAID LEAVE AMONG WOMEN DURING THE PANDEMIC**

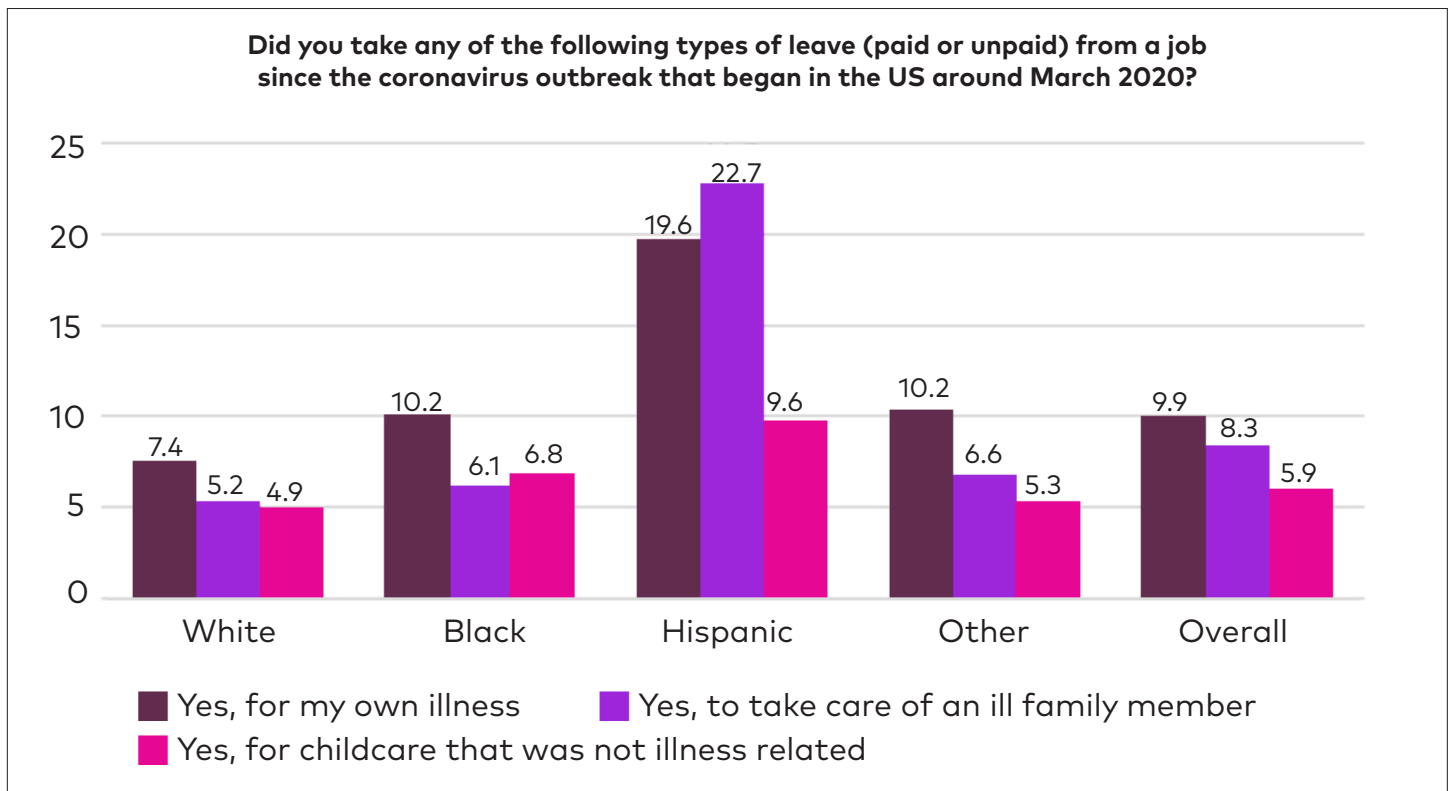
Since the start of the Pandemic, Latinas report the highest levels of taking leave from their jobs for their own health issues or to provide care for their families compared to other groups of women: almost one in five (19.6 percent) have taken leave for their own illness and nearly one in four (22.7 percent) Latinas have taken leave to care for ill family members. Leave taking is lower, although still substantial, among white women for all three reasons than reported by women in the other groups when comparing across reasons for leave.



Across race and ethnicity, 69 percent of women surveyed strongly support paid sick and time away from work to have a child, recover from serious health conditions, or to care for a family member.



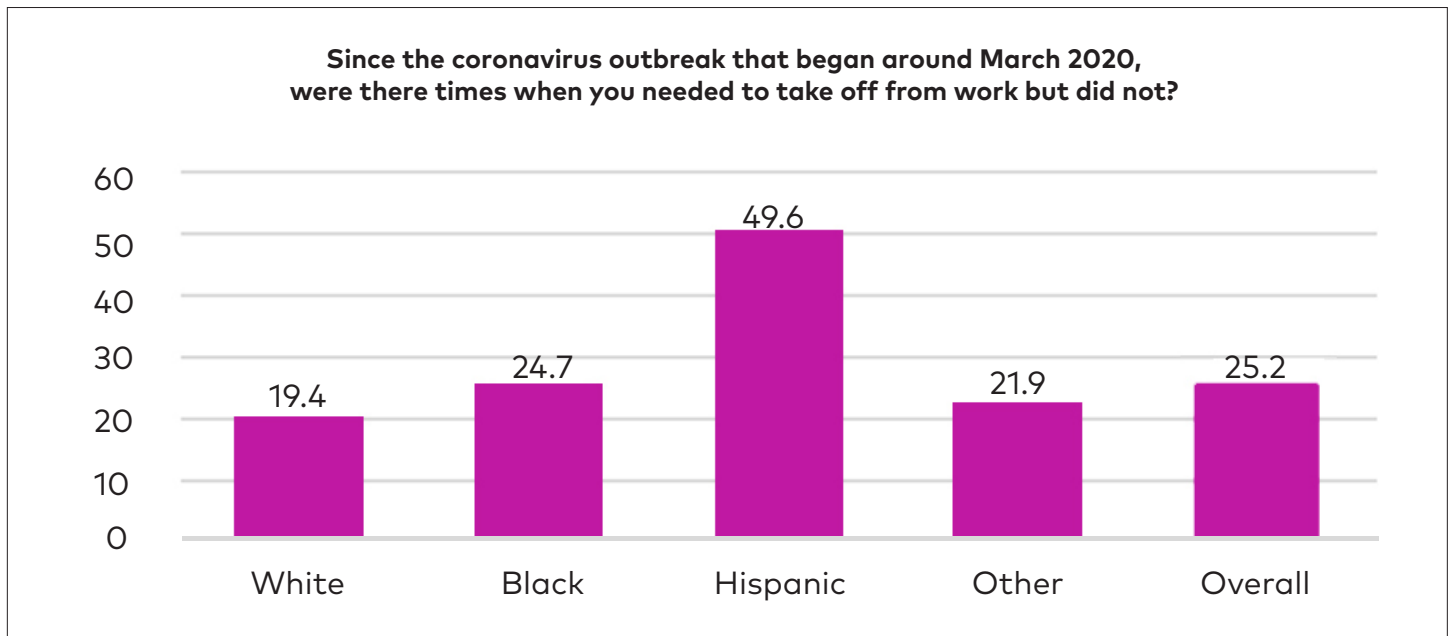
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## NO TIME TO TAKE TIME OFF FOR WOMEN WORKERS

One in four women (25.2 percent) report that during the pandemic they needed to take time off from work but did not. Latinas and Black women were also most likely to report that there were times during the pandemic when they needed to take time off from work but did not do so. About half (49.6 percent) of Latinas report that during the pandemic there has been at least one occasion where they needed to take leave from work, but they did not.



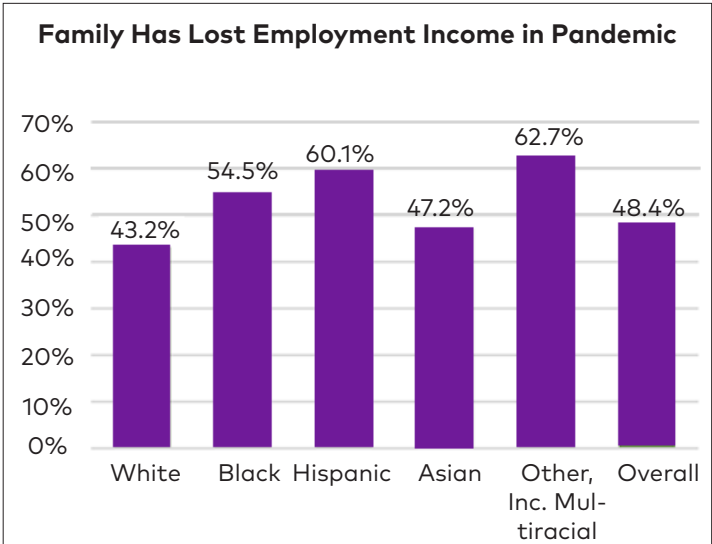
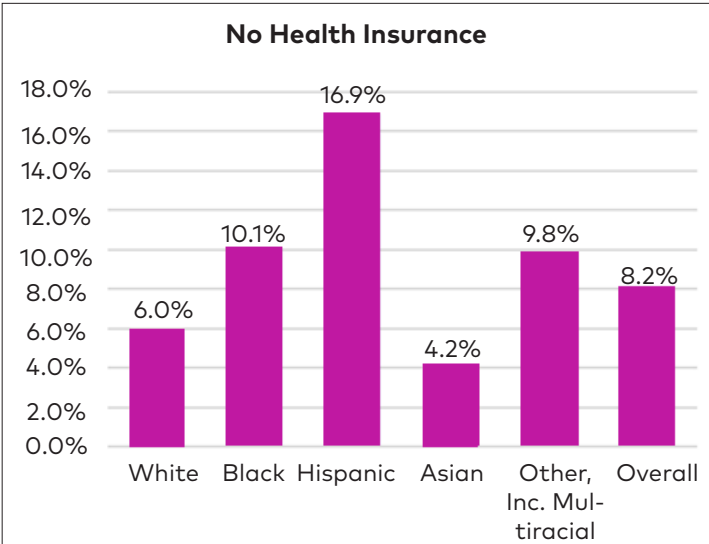
Source: IWPR Women's Priorities and Economic Impact Survey collected February 2-11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

The United States remains the only high-income country that does not guarantee paid sick days or paid family and medical leave for workers to use for their own health or to care for their families. The Family Medical Leave Act (1993) provides job protected, but unpaid leave, for about 56 percent of workers. The Families First Coronavirus Relief Act provided some additional access to paid leave during the pandemic in 2020, but estimates are that more than 100 million workers were excluded because they are care givers.



Women have lost more jobs in the COVID-19 induced economic downturn than men; and Black and Latina women have been disproportionately hurt among women (Mason 2020). Job losses have continued to mount for women, especially Latinas, in December 2020 and January 2021. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, women of color, especially Latinas, report a higher instance of lacking health insurance and lost family wages compared to white women. These major challenges to economic security illustrate the need for robust and immediate relief policies from our nation's leaders.





Source: IWPR analysis of the Census Household Pulse Survey for Week 22 (January 6 – January 18, 2021)



## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession had a disproportionate impact on women, especially Black and Latina women, working in service, leisure and hospitality, education, and healthcare. Many of these jobs pay low wages and offer few benefits. If we do not adequately address the gendered and racial impact of the COVID-fueled economic downturn and the challenges to women reentering the workforce, women will continue to exit the workforce and lose ground in the labor market.

IWPR asked women about their priorities for the new Administration and Congress. Across different race and ethnic groups, they agreed that healthcare is among their top priorities. The next two highest are related to each other and a result of the pandemic: women want to see the federal government address economic recession and unemployment. Racial justice or inequality and Taxes rounded out the top five most common priorities.



In addition to their identified policy priorities, women surveyed expressed high levels of economic insecurity, pointing to the need for additional economic supports and assistance that will create high-quality jobs, strengthen social and public infrastructures, value care, raise wages and improve labor standards, and address historic and persistent racial and gender inequities.

There is a need for targeted programs and policy solutions to help ensure a gender-equitable recovery. However, the policy framework suggested for a gender-equitable recovery is not only about meeting the immediate economic needs of women and families, but includes some long-term strategies for creating more resilient systems and stronger institutions that reflect the experiences and contributions of women in the workforce, in society, and in their families.

In the short term, there is a need for direct economic supports for families that include ongoing economic impact payments and increased subsidies for child care, housing, and food.

Specifically, there is a need for enhanced unemployment insurance as long as the demand for labor is suppressed by the pandemic. Benefits need to continue to reach families where breadwinners have been unable to work due to public health policies aimed at mitigating the virus as many could begin to reach their state's maximum benefit weeks. The expanded coverage should include self-employed, freelancers, independent contractors, and those with limited work histories. The costs for these new benefits could be shared by federal, state, and local governments.

**Continue Economic Impact Payments.** Providing Economic Impact Payments to families would alleviate some of the economic concerns reported by women in their ability for their families' income to meet their expenses. All workers and families that pay or file federal and state income taxes should be eligible, including families with mixed status members. If such payments cannot be based on recent income for administrative reasons, then efforts to means-test the benefits should be postponed until 2021 income is reported for tax purposes in 2022.

**Expand Access to Affordable Healthcare:** Continuing to expand access to health insurance and make health care affordable is vital and a high priority for women across groups. Re-opening the health insurance exchanges for those who have lost employer-provided coverage is a good first step. Expanding subsidies to individuals and states that expand access to public health insurance in the next rescue plans is vital.

**Provide Paid Sick and Medical Leave:** Working people need access to time off from work to take care of their own health or to care for family members. While the tax incentives to some businesses to provide leave were extended in December 2020, the worker protections for leave taking were allowed to expire at the end of 2020. Congress should pass comprehensive federal paid sick and family medical leave legislation that would provide at least seven days of paid sick leave and 12 weeks of paid medical leave to employees regardless of firm size, sector, and hours worked per week.

**Raise the Federal Minimum Wage:** The federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 since 2009. A robust recovery will depend on expanding access to good jobs including wages that can support a family above the poverty line. These goals would be aided by phasing in a federal minimum wage of \$15.00 per hour, eliminating the tipped minimum wage, and adjusting for inflation annually (Cooper 2019a). The increase would boost total annual wages for low-wage workers in hardest-hit sectors by \$92.5 billion, lifting annual earnings for the average affected year-round worker by \$2,800 (Cooper 2019b).

**Build a New Childcare Infrastructure:** High-quality, affordable child care is out of reach for many working women and families. It is also one of the chief barriers for women attempting to reenter the workforce, sustain employment, or advance in their careers.

For an equitable economic recovery and to recoup historic job losses by women since the start of the pandemic, the United States should establish a national care system that is able to meet the needs of all families, raise wages for workers, and provide high-quality child care regardless of race, ethnicity, or geographic location. In this system, child care should be treated as a public good, rather than as a private obligation for families.

## OUR MISSION | A just future begins with bold ideas.

We win economic equity for all women and eliminate barriers to their full participation in society. As a leading national think tank, we build evidence to shape policies that grow women's power and influence, close inequality gaps, and improve the economic well-being of families.

