

ALL WORK AND LITTLE PAY

IWPR Survey Shows Worrying Challenges for Working Mothers

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IWPR's new survey finds that, on the heels of the economic downturn, working mothers are skeptical about their ability to achieve equal pay. They also report being worried about paying bills and balancing work and family demands. Paid leave and health care are top priorities.

TOPLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

- **Mothers are pessimistic about achieving equal pay and say their employers believe they are less committed to their work because of caretaking responsibilities.**
- **More than six in ten mothers are either very or somewhat worried about having enough income to pay the family's bills, compared to one in three other women.**
- **Close to two-thirds of mothers report being very or somewhat worried about balancing work responsibilities with their own personal and family needs, compared to three in ten other women.**
- **Over half of all mothers (55.4 percent) are either very or somewhat worried about having affordable and secure health insurance for their family, compared to four in ten other women (40.5 percent).**
- **Mothers with dependent children (under age 18) report much higher levels of economic insecurity than other women: 35.0 percent of mothers are very worried about having enough income to meet their family's expenses, compared to 16.7 percent of women without children under 18 – more than twice the level.**

The Motherhood Penalty Translates to Unequal Pay, Discrimination, and Lack of Benefits

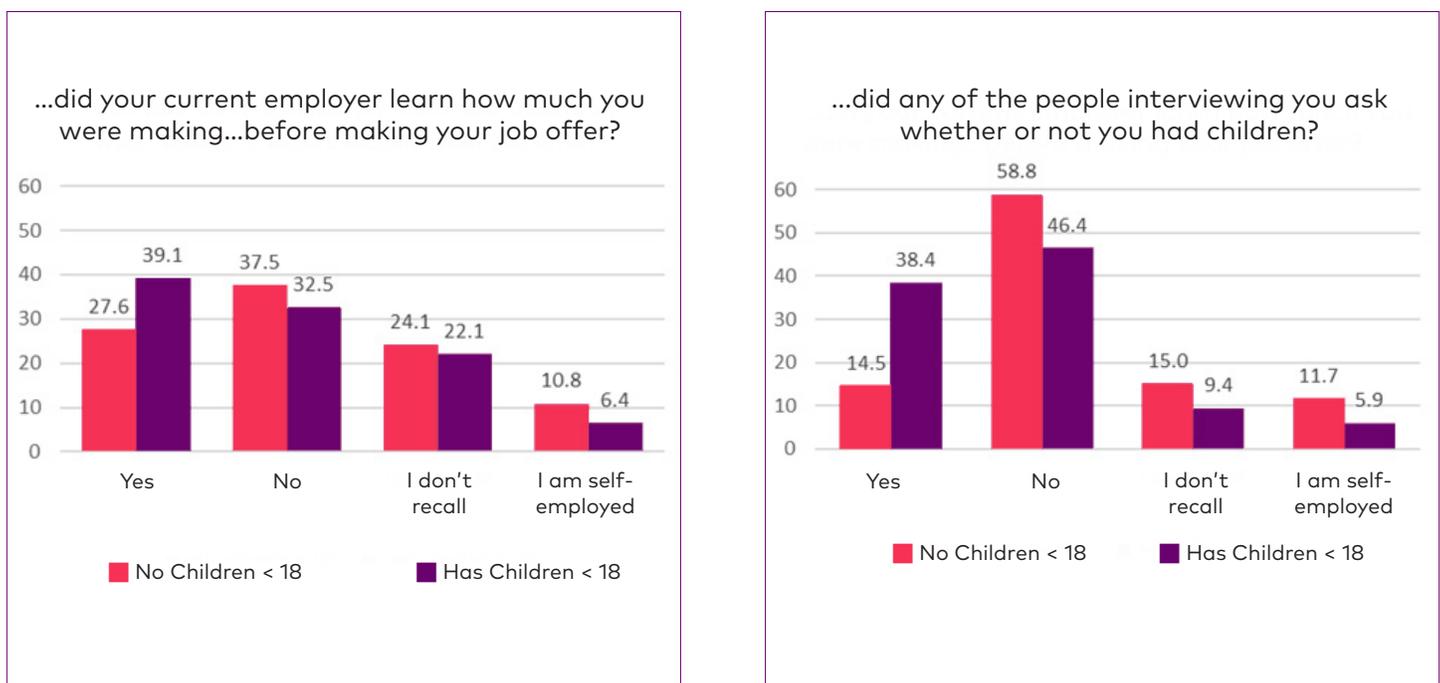
When it comes to making household decisions about who should leave the workforce, gender norms and expectations—paired with lower earnings for women compared with men—almost ensure that women will be the ones to resign or quit their jobs. Exiting the workforce prematurely due to caretaking responsibilities can have a devastating effect on women’s economic security and long-term earnings. Research shows that mothers’ income drops 30 percent after the birth of a first child, and a recent study found that mothers are offered starting salaries 8 percent lower than women who are not parents and 9 percent lower than fathers (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Kleven, Landais, and Sogaard 2018).

In 2019, prior to the pandemic, mothers who worked full-time year-round earned only 75 cents for every dollar earned by the average father (Tucker 2021).

- 53 percent of mothers are pessimistic about achieving equal pay and say their employers believe they are less committed to their work.
- In terms of their treatment in the workplace, almost half (47.6 percent) of all mothers of children under 18 report being treated as if they are not fully committed to their job.
- Close to four in ten (38.8 percent) of mothers report having been passed over for a promotion.
- Close to four in ten (39.1 percent) mothers report being asked if they had children when they were interviewed for their last job.

FIGURE 1. Working Mothers Are Frequently Asked About Family Status and Previous Salary during Job Interviews

Thinking back to when you were first applying for your current job:



Source: IWPR Women’s Equal Pay and Economic Opportunity Survey collected March 9–23, 2021. 1,410 respondents. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

Closing the Pay Gap and Countering Workplace Discrimination

Women say prohibiting employers from asking about salary history and making company pay data public would go a long way to close the pay gap and increase pay transparency.

- 82.7 percent of mothers and 79.3 percent of other women want salary ranges to be made public with any vacancy announcements.
- 63.9 percent of mothers and 65.3 percent of other women want to ban companies from asking about salary history during the hiring process.
- 77.7 percent of mothers and other women want companies to be mandated to provide pay data to government.
- Nearly seven in ten women agree that paid leave is "very important," including 69.7 percent of women with children and 68.7 percent of women who do not currently have children under 18.

Mothers Face Hurdles in Making Ends Meet Compared to Other Groups of Women

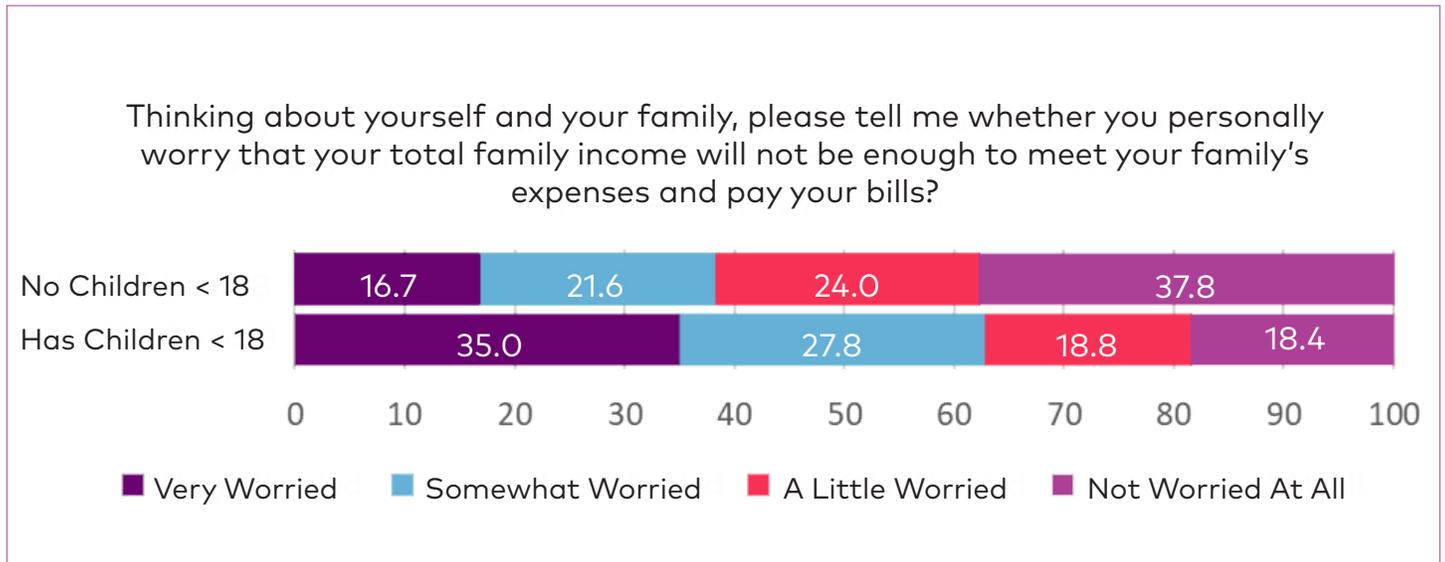
During COVID-19, mothers who are the primary wage earners in their families faced tremendous threats to their economic security. Becoming unemployed or experiencing a sharp decline in income due to reduced hours or furloughs can have a devastating impact on overall economic wellbeing for mothers and families.



Black mothers are more likely to be breadwinners or primary wage earners than women of other racial and ethnic groups. Four of five Black mothers (79 percent) are breadwinners, with a majority of Black mothers (56 percent) raising families on their own. Approximately 64 percent of Native American and Alaska Native mothers and 48 percent of Latina women are breadwinners.

More than sixty percent of mothers with children under the age of 18 reported being worried that their total family income would not be enough to meet family expenses, compared to about one-third of women without children.

FIGURE 2. Mothers of Children Under 18 Are Twice as Likely as Other Women to Report Being Very Worried About Having Enough Income to Meet Their Family's Expenses



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

Mothers Worry about Their Ability to Balance Caretaking and Work Demands

Before COVID-19, women in the United States spent 37 percent more time on household and care work than men (Hess, Ahmed, and Hayes 2020). Black and Latina women spent considerably more time on care work than their male counterparts and White women. Even when women work full time outside of the home, they are still expected to shoulder the lion's share of caretaking responsibility in the home. With schools and daycares closed, the caretaking responsibilities of women have increased exponentially.

Close to two-thirds of mothers report being very or somewhat worried about balancing work responsibilities with their own personal and family needs, compared to three in ten other women.

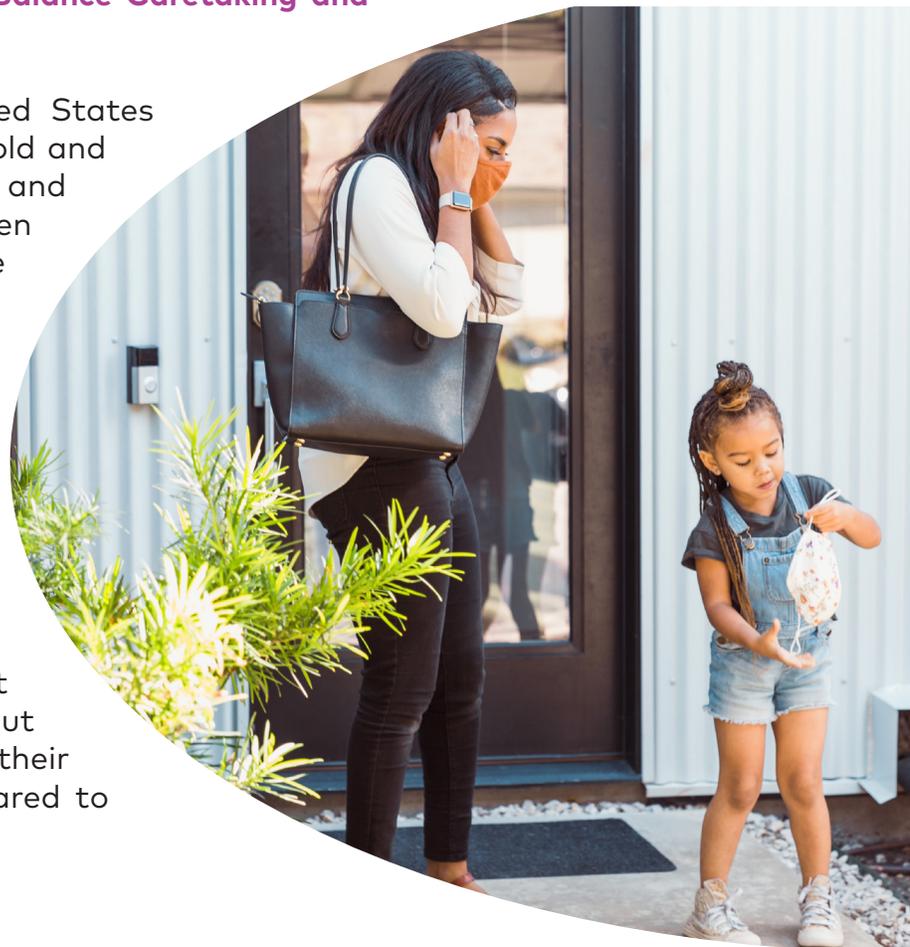
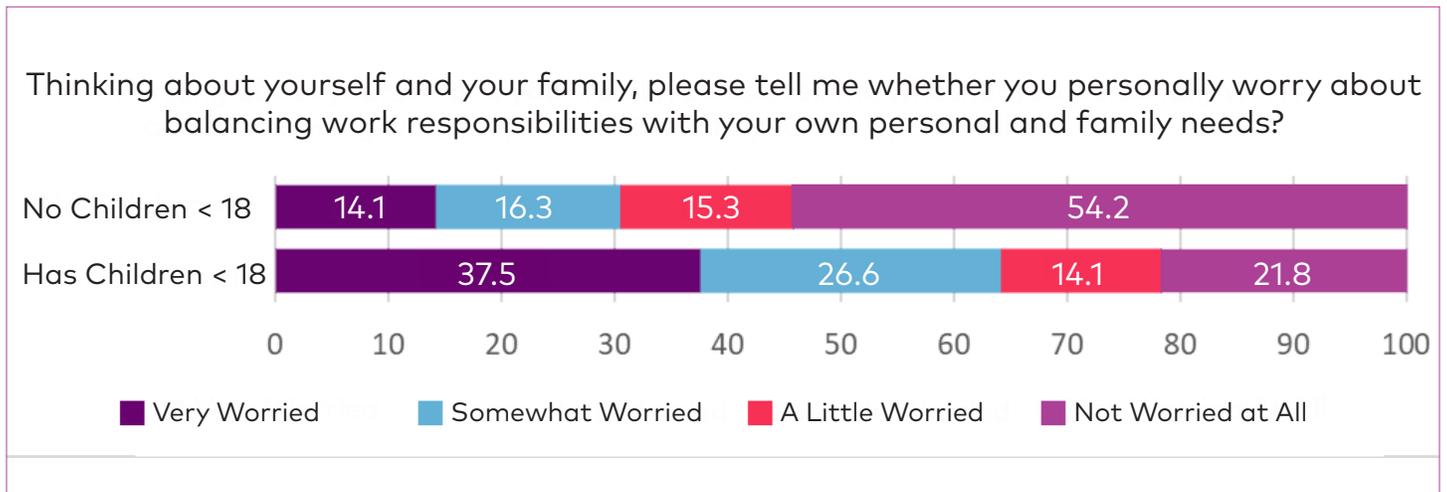


FIGURE 3. Mothers with Children Under 18 Struggle to Balance Work and Family Demands More than Other Women

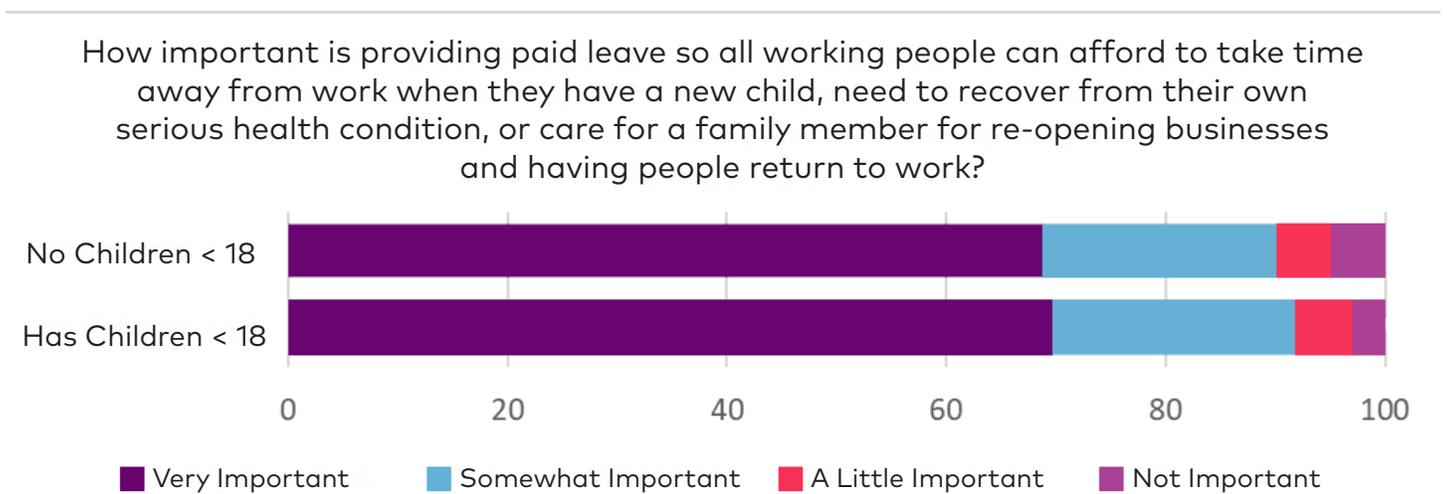


Source: IWPR Women’s Priorities and Pandemic Economic Impact Survey collected February 2–11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

Paid Leave Is Priority for Working Mothers

The pandemic triggered increased need for family caregiving, and women with children under age 18 were much more likely than other women to have taken paid or unpaid leave from their jobs over the last year. Regardless of parental status, more than 80 percent of women support providing paid sick leave.

FIGURE 4. Regardless of Parental Status, Women See Paid Leave as a Top Priority

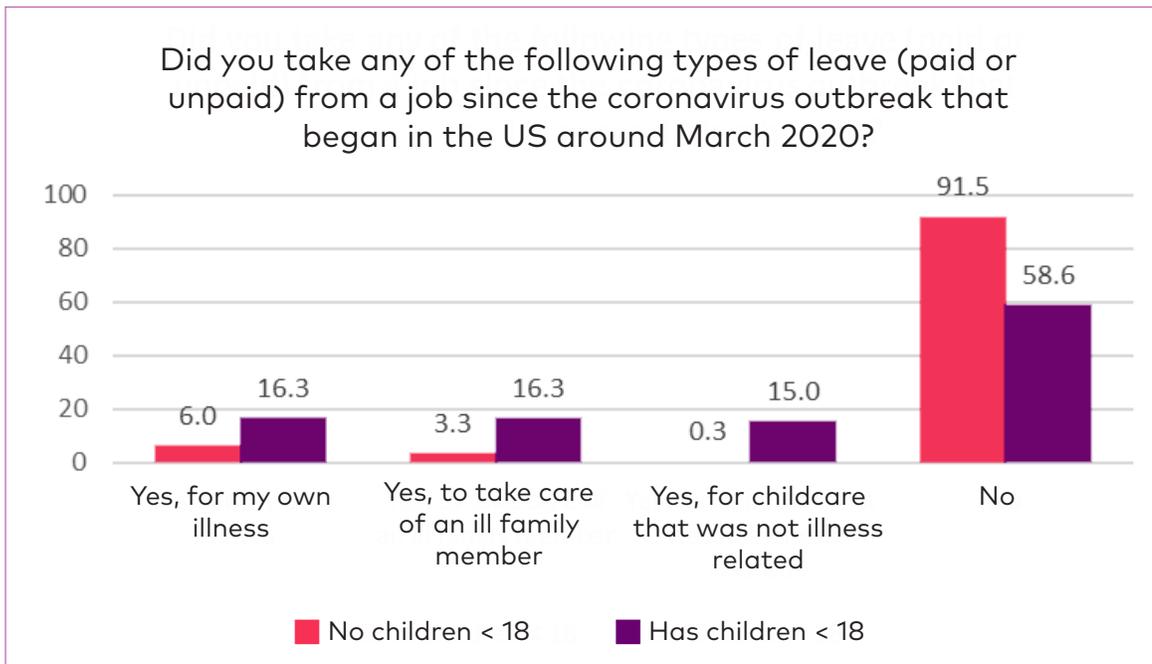


Source: IWPR Women’s Priorities and Pandemic Economic Impact Survey collected February 2–11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

Mothers Take More Leave to Care for Family Members or Themselves

During the pandemic, more than four in ten women with children (41.4 percent) took some leave from their jobs, compared to 8.5 percent of women without children. Women with children younger than 18 were 2.5 times more likely to take leave for their own illness (16.3 percent) than other women (6.0 percent). They were also much more likely to take leave to care for an ill family member (16.3 percent) or for childcare not related to illness (15.0 percent) compared to other women (3.3 percent and 0.3 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 5. During the Pandemic, Mothers with Children Under 18 Were Much More Likely to Take Leave than Other Women



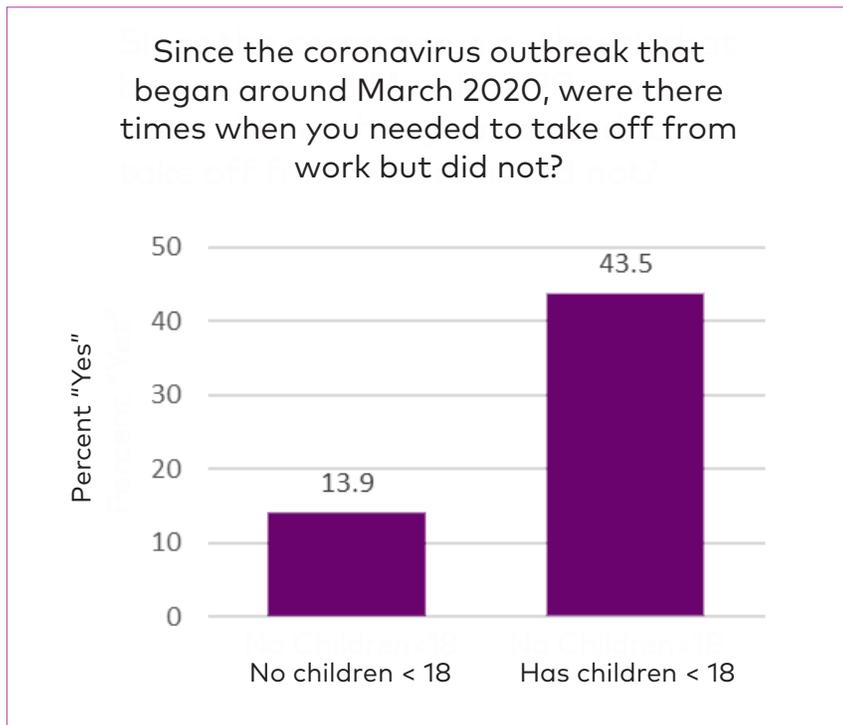
Source: IWPR Women's Priorities and Pandemic Economic Impact Survey collected February 2–11, 2021. 1,452 respondents. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

No Time for Leave for Working Mothers



Working women with children say there were times that they needed to take leave for work, but did not. Among women with dependent children, 43.5 percent report that at some point during the COVID-19 pandemic there were times they needed to take off from work but did not, compared to 13.9 percent of women without children.

FIGURE 6. Mothers with Children Under 18 Were About Three Times More Likely to Have Unmet Need for Leave than Other Women



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

Affordable, High-Quality Child Care Is Out of Reach for Working Mothers

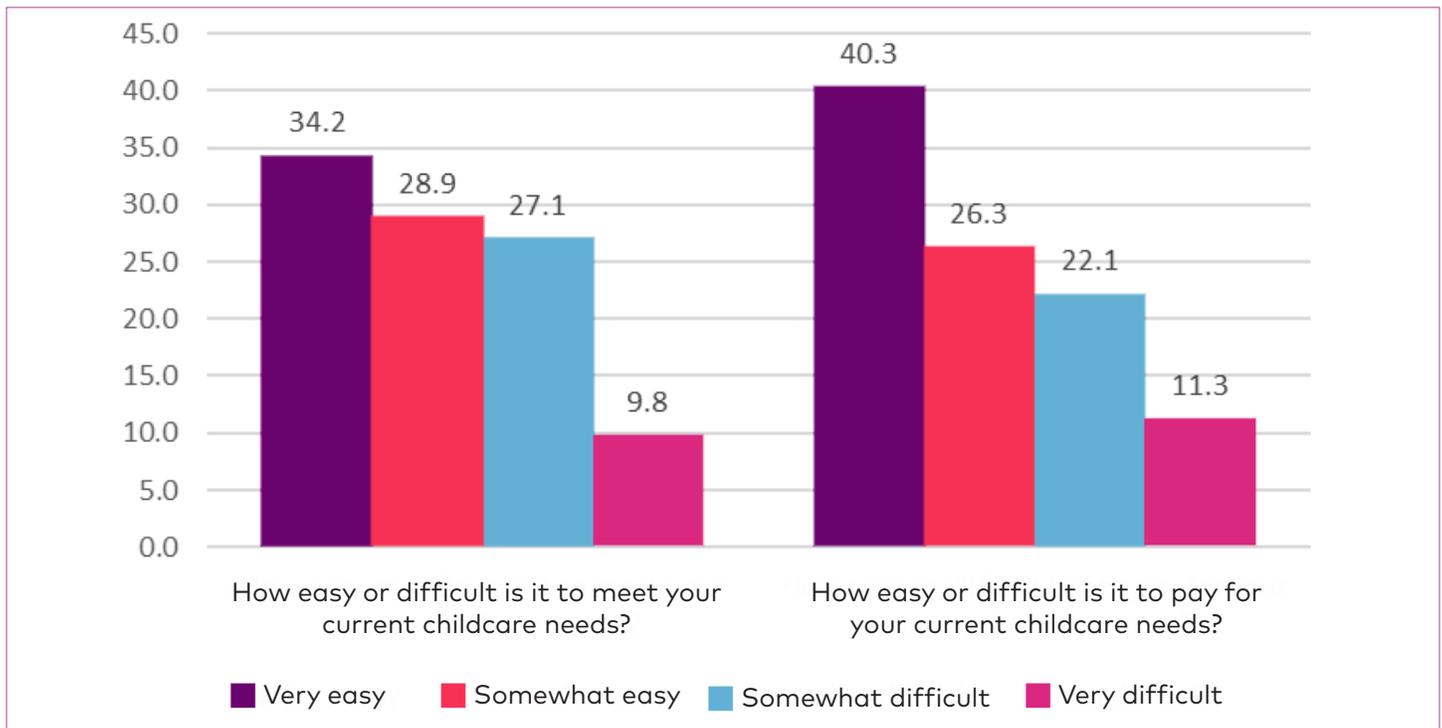
High-quality, affordable child care is out of reach for many working women and families. The lack of high-quality affordable child care is a significant barrier to women re-entering the workforce and sustaining employment. Thirty-three percent of working women between the ages of 23 to 39 say that school and daycare closures are a significant reason for not working, compared to just 11.8 percent of men (Malik and Morrissey 2020).

One in three mothers has difficulty meeting child-care needs and costs. Thirty-seven percent of mothers report that it is "somewhat" (27.1 percent) or "very" (9.8 percent) difficult to meet their current child-care needs. Similarly, one in three have difficulty paying for their child-care needs: 22.1 percent report it being "somewhat difficult" and 11.3 percent say it is "very difficult."

To compound matters, employment in the child-care sector continues to lag behind recovery in other sectors (Hegewisch and Mefferd 2021), limiting choices for mothers seeking a return to full-time employment.



FIGURE 7. More than One In Three Mothers Report Difficulty in Finding Affordable, High Quality Child Care



Source: IWPR Women's Priorities and Pandemic Economic Impact Survey collected February 2–11, 2021. 578 respondents with children under 18. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Towards an Equitable and Inclusive Recovery for Mothers

Working women and mothers have been disproportionately impacted by job and income losses since the start of the pandemic. Compared to men, they are more likely to be employed in the hardest-hit sectors and shoulder most of the caregiving responsibilities in families. As the nation turns to recovery, it will be important to ensure that women have the necessary supports to re-enter the workforce and sustain employment, provide for their families, and access high-quality and affordable child care.

Recovery efforts must include a strong child care infrastructure, paid sick and family leave, and programs that address job loss in the most impacted sectors, including education, healthcare, leisure and hospitality, and service. There is also a need for education, training, and continued economic supports for women who are not able to return to work due to caretaking responsibilities or an inability to find employment. Bold investments like these will set us on a solid path to a prosperous, equitable recovery that will uplift mothers, women, and families.

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