

The Year that Changed Everything: The Burden of the Working Woman in a Pandemic



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It's no secret that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on our way of life, and that its impact will forever change the way we live.

At this time last year, what was "normal" life began to shift dramatically. We went into lockdown, many of us started working remotely, school children began distance learning, we stopped traveling and social distancing became the new standard across so many facets of life. And it hasn't been an easy road in any regard. Nearly 30 million Americans have been diagnosed with Covid-19 and more than half a million have lost their lives. Millions more have lost their jobs, haven't seen loved ones, put major life plans on hold and suffered other immeasurable loss.

While no one would argue that there isn't a segment of people that hasn't been impacted by the pandemic in some way, it's also apparent that one group has taken a disproportionate hit: working women, especially those who are mothers of school-aged children.

As this month marks the one-year anniversary of life in a pandemic across the U.S., now is the time to evaluate just how

much of an impact the virus has had on the women of America, particularly when it comes to work, and to explore ways to correct any negative course so that we don't hold women back any further.

A recent survey commissioned by Affect to look at the impact of Covid-19 on the U.S. workforce revealed that women are doing more with less reward, and that the impact has been particularly prevalent among mothers who work. Highlights of the findings reveal several ways women have taken on more than their fair share of the burden:

- **Making Less Money** – While about two in five people in the workforce indicate that they make less money now than they did before the pandemic, that number jumps when it comes to working women with children under the age of 18. More than half of those working moms (53%) say they make less money now than a year ago.
- **Career Paths Interrupted** – Women overall were more than twice as likely as men to take a temporary leave of absence from a job to handle caregiving or household tasks during the pandemic, and one in five working moms with minor children did just that. While the rate of promotions among those in the workforce remained low over the last year, men were more than three times as likely to receive a promotion at work than women. For working parents, dads of children under 18 were five times more likely to be promoted than working moms.
- **Career Outlooks Hindered** – While about one in ten women (9%) have considered leaving the workforce permanently as a result of the pandemic, the rate significantly increases to about one in four working mothers (24%) – a staggering difference compared to just 6% of working father who claim the same.
- **Job Performance Diminished** – Men are twice as likely as women to say that their job performance improved over

the past year (24% of men vs 12% of women). Alternately, more than one in five women (18%) and nearly one third of working moms (32%) say their job performance declined.

- **Increased Demands Outside Work** – Nearly one third of working parents of children under 18 (32%) have spent more time on child care over the last year, but women seem to be shouldering a bit more of the responsibility, especially when it comes to their child or children's education. Nearly half of working moms (47%) say they've spent more time overseeing schooling and education during the pandemic, compared to less than a third (31%) of working dads.
- **Being Stretched Thin** – One in three women (33%) report they have gotten less sleep during the pandemic, compared to one in five men (20%). It's no surprise that number jumps to 44% of working moms, but a bit alarming that working dads seem to be much less impacted by sleep deprivation, with only 18% reporting they have gotten less snooze time over the last year.

While it's clear that life in a pandemic will continue for some time, we need to reverse the undue and unbalanced pressures women have had to face, and employers can play a big role in making that shift happen. But what can they do? The Affect survey asked those in the workforce how their employers can set them up for success while working through the pandemic, and women respondents shared some pretty clear recommendations:

- **Pay them more.** Even before the pandemic, women have historically been fighting against pay inequity, and the last year has reinforced why women must be on at least even ground with their men counterparts. More than half of women (52%) say that a pay increase would help them be more successful while working. Might this have

something to do with how being paid one's worth and motivation to do good work go hand in hand?

- **Make flexible schedules a thing.** Nearly two in five women overall (37%) and working moms (38%) say that they would achieve more work success if they were offered flexible hours (compared to 19% of working dads). Employers who acknowledge and are accommodating to the childcare, household and other burdens outside work that women take on will certainly be seen as women-friendly workplaces.
- **Offer the support they need.** Instead of shaming women employees for the 10 minutes they may have been late, the deadlines they may have missed, the time they appeared distracted in a zoom meeting or how frazzled they may look, check in on them and ask how they are really doing. Nearly one in four women (24%) say that having access to mental health services would make them a more successful working during the pandemic, compared to just one in ten men (11%). Workplaces who normalize seeking help for mental health struggles are not only progressive, but also see a direct impact on the work output.

Lastly, one other – and perhaps the most important – thing that women need to help them achieve success in the workplace, not just during a national crisis but as an ongoing expectation moving forward, is allyship from men. The Affect survey revealed that nearly half of working women (45%) and three in five working moms (59%) agree that women have been more negatively impacted in the workplace by the pandemic, versus less than one third of men (29%). After men in the workforce – especially those in leadership positions – begin to understand and acknowledge the burden that women have shouldered over the past year, we need them to work alongside us to make the changes necessary for all of us to achieve more together.

Methodology: Findings are based on an online poll of 250 American adults in the workforce conducted between February 22-February 28, 2021.