

# Despite workplace successes, female employment is increasingly at risk due to COVID-19, research shows

March 1 2022, by Patrick Lejtenyi

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

From the factory floor to the C-suite, women have seen their recent gains in workplace equality be eroded by the ongoing health crisis. This

is despite a direct relationship between an inclusive work environment and a healthy bottom line.

A new paper by Concordia researchers published in the *European Journal of Business Management Research* argues that while companies acknowledge that positive relationship, too many have discarded inclusivity practices following the pandemic's outbreak. This is not just bad for [women](#), they write. It will be bad for the company's future growth and profitability.

"As we point out in the study, women are 12 times more likely to step away from their jobs to take care of family members, whether it's children or elderly parents. And if they stay, they may see their careers suffer due to reduced ability to focus on their work," says the paper's co-author, Shirin Emadi-Mahabadi. "In the long run, women losing or leaving their jobs in bulk will not only negatively affect global GDP. It will also reverse the progress that was being made before the pandemic."

## **Multiple risks**

The researchers examined dozens of workplace dynamics reports by global management consulting firms such as McKinsey & Company and Deloitte, as well as large banks like RBC.

The pandemic, they found, has adversely affected women in the workplace in multiple ways. One report stated that women's jobs were 19 percent more at risk than those of men because they are disproportionately represented in sectors vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis. Another report estimated that global GDP will be one trillion dollars lower by 2030 if no action is taken to mitigate job losses for women. However, the same report states that giving women and minorities access to [teleworking](#) technology and other measures could add up to 13 trillion dollars to global GDP.

Women are also more at risk from job automation, which has increased over the course of the pandemic. Automation has impacted men and women almost equally, but men are more likely to be retrained and rehired because women face traditional barriers preventing them from developing new skills.

Furthermore, the researchers write, the pandemic has placed existing inclusivity and diversity hiring measures at risk. Emadi-Mahabadi points out that these measures were already falling well short of stated goals long before COVID-19. She worries that firms will use the public health crisis to stall or reverse any goals they achieved, however modest.

"If these measures drop off, it will not be a short-term problem," she says. "In five or 10 years, whenever the next crisis hits, where will we be then?"

## **Happier workers work better**

The authors also found ample literature showing that women executives and managers often outperform their male counterparts. This, says lead author Steven Appelbaum, a professor of management at the John Molson School of Business, is due in large part to leadership traits more often exhibited by women leaders: inspirational behavior, participative decision-making, setting expectations and rewards, people development and being a good role model. This is in contrast, he says, to the ego-driven "my-way-or-the-highway" approach often seen in male managers.

"We have seen that the countries that have managed the pandemic best, like New Zealand, are led by women," Appelbaum says. "The research shows that unless you have more inclusion, you will not be getting the people who have the skillset required to manage through the pandemic."

Despite these headwinds for women, Emadi-Mahabadi and Appelbaum

believe that the COVID-19 crisis has presented opportunities as well.

"Employers are realizing that if they don't offer their employees some flexibility to work remotely, they won't be able to build talent through their organizations," Emadi-Mahabadi says.

**More information:** Steven H. Appelbaum et al, Gender Parity in The Workplace: How COVID-19 Has Affected Women, *European Journal of Business and Management Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.24018/ejbmr.2022.7.1.1169](https://doi.org/10.24018/ejbmr.2022.7.1.1169)

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: Despite workplace successes, female employment is increasingly at risk due to COVID-19, research shows (2022, March 1) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-03-workplace-successes-female-employment-increasingly.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.