Will the COVID-19 pandemic have a lasting impact on gender inequality in the U.S. workforce?

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A recent analysis published in *Economic Inquiry* found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. women with school-age children suffered losses in employment (and reduced work hours) to a greater extent than men. Male-female gaps in employment were not significantly changed for women with younger children.

The study's results suggest that most of the work reductions observed for women with school-age children were attributable to additional childcare responsibilities as children spent more time at home due to school closures—or the "COVID motherhood penalty."

The authors note that these shifts caused by the pandemic could have lasting negative effects on women's employment and pay.

"The study confirms the widespread observation that the employment impacts of the pandemic have fallen most heavily among mothers with school age children," said co-author Kenneth A. Couch, Ph.D., of the University of Connecticut. "As children arrived home unexpectedly due to school closures related to the pandemic, women bore a disproportionate share of the caregiving burden. This resulted in relatively large reductions in women's employment and hours of work compared to men."

More information: Kenneth A. Couch et al, The evolving impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender inequality in the US labor market: The COVID motherhood penalty, *Economic Inquiry* (2022). DOI: 10.1111/ecin.13054

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