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Maria J. D'Agostino
CUNY John Jay College

Nicole M. Elias
CUNY John Jay College

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COVID-19 as a Catalyst for U.S. Child Care Policy Reform

Maria J. D'Agostino and Nicole M. Elias, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

The burden of child care in the wake of widespread K-12 school closures has disproportionately harmed women, communities of color, and lower income families – a clear indicator that now is the time to adopt a federally-subsidized childcare system in local communities that goes beyond public schools. Current proposals must address regulatory and financial challenges to child care centers and home-based providers, allow for local government involvement and discretion, and maintain flexibility for parents with non-traditional work schedules.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON WORKING PARENTS

Widespread layoffs and furloughs combined with the lack of available and affordable child care outside the public school system have destroyed the careers and livelihoods of many American parents – but not all parents have suffered equally.

Women represent **55% of the 9.8 million** net jobs lost from April-December 2020

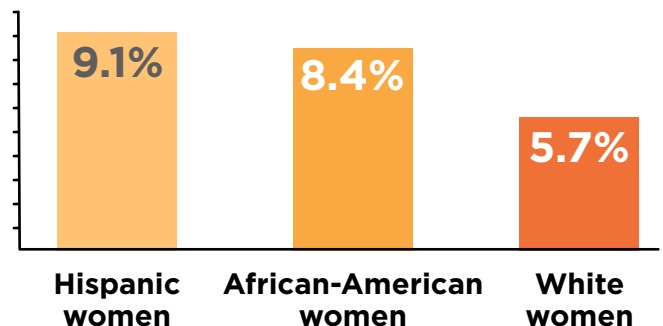
In December 2020 alone,

-156,000 women

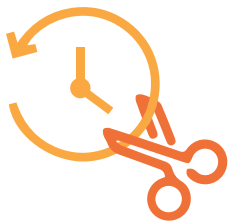
lost jobs compared to

+16,000 jobs added for **men.**

Unemployment is even more disproportionate for women of color:



ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON GENDER EQUITY




Women are disproportionately losing jobs, but they're also disproportionately leaving jobs or cutting hours in order to provide child care during school closures. Women essential workers have had to contend with an even more impossible situation, cobbling together ad hoc child care that drains their financial resources and imperils their efficiency at work. That lost income and time away


from the workforce will reverberate over decades to come – and inequalities will deepen further with each subsequent recession or national emergency.

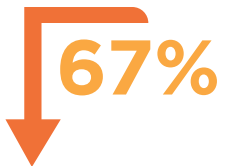
ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Childcare providers are in dire need of increased financial support and regulatory flexibility to stay open, pay their workers, and keep children and employees safe.

Providers that were still closed as of December 2020:

 **18%** of center-based child care providers

 **9%** of home-based child care providers

On average, enrollment is down by **67%** 



1 in 4 child care providers reported applying for or receiving unemployment benefits.



73% of programs indicated that they have or will engage in layoffs, furloughs, and/or pay cuts.



For minority-owned businesses, the situation is worse; **88%** have resorted to these measures in order to survive.

NEW YORK CITY'S CHILDCARE EXPERIMENT



New York launched enrichment centers using **\$30 million** of the **\$164 million** received from the **CARES Act** – an effective first-step to remedy gender inequities resulting from the child care crisis. They allowed women who would be tasked with child care to remain in the workforce.



In New York City, these spaces adhered to safety protocols, were open throughout the traditional work week, and were operated by staff from the Department of Education and volunteers from social service organizations. Approximately **10,000** students use these facilities.

KEY AREAS FOR CHILD CARE POLICY REFORM



COVID-19 is an opportunity to instill lasting change by improving current U.S. child care policy. Reform should take into account challenges parents face in order to disrupt gender imbalances in care, and in turn, produce greater gender equity.

COVID-19 clearly highlights the need for a child care system that is federally subsidized in local communities beyond the public education system, a system that does not lose sight of caregiver challenges, federally-funded with local involvement and discretion, and flexible for primary caregivers seeking care support. Such a system would help to ameliorate the structural inequities that perpetuate gender inequity.