



CLOSING THE CARE GAP

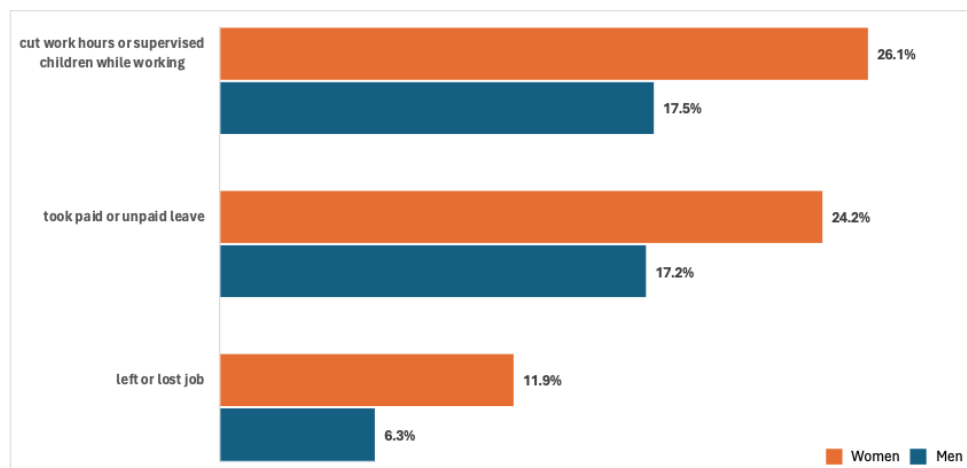
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Approximately [40 percent](#) of adults in the U.S. workforce are parents, with [10 percent](#) having young children. Caregiving responsibilities are essential for a community's well-being but are often overlooked in traditional economic and policy evaluations. This has serious ramifications as much of this work continues to be undertaken by women. Despite [broader trends](#) toward more equal contributions to household finances, women still perform a larger share of care responsibilities in the household compared to men.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the deep connections between caregiving and socio-economic indicators. Widespread school closures and stay-at-home orders meant households had to spend more hours on care work. This prompts the question of who in the household will put in these extra hours and at what cost. **Research shows that during the pandemic, women were taking up a larger share of the increased caregiving responsibilities compared to men at the expense of reduced work hours and worse health outcomes.**

Understanding the gender distribution of care work is crucial not only for designing policies that effectively recognize and redistribute this labor but also for grasping the gendered effects of macroeconomic shocks. A recent [report](#) found that women were 1.5 times more likely than men to report child care disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, as illustrated in the figure below, these interruptions in child care availability were more likely to impact paid employment opportunities or work hours for women than they were for men.

IMPACT OF INTERRUPTIONS IN CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY ON CAREGIVERS:



POLICY SOLUTIONS

The current child care systems fail to meet the needs of many families, which ultimately disproportionately impacts women. Addressing these gaps through short- and long-term measures is thus a crucial step in making stronger progress toward gender equality.

Before- and after-school programs, as well as summer programs, comprise important components of the existing child care infrastructure. Channeling more financial resources to support and expand these programs can increase access to these essential care services.

Creating a national paid family and medical leave program would allow employed individuals to take time off without worrying about job loss for personal health or caregiving reasons. Proposed legislative measures such as the Job Protection Act and the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act aim to expand the existing Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) coverage. Additionally, it's important that such a program be equally accessible for men to receive the leave benefits. This would allow for greater sharing of caregiving responsibilities while also allowing both parents to remain attached to the workforce.

Longer-term policies should focus on restructuring the overall child care system to ensure all families have access to affordable and quality child care. Several bills in the Senate such as the Child Care for Working Families Act and the Child Care for Every Community Act represent concrete steps toward these goals by addressing two key pitfalls of the current system: (i) lack of affordable and reliable child care facilities; (ii) fair compensation for the invaluable work performed by child care providers.

Closing the care gap necessitates a concerted effort from policymakers, employers, and society as a whole to recognize the value of caregiving and enact policies that empower caregivers, promote gender equality, and foster economic resilience.

For a detailed analysis of this issue and more policy recommendations:
Annette Jacoby, Anamika Sen, Gina Kelley, and Alejandra Montoya-Boyer, "[Unseen Work, Unmet Needs: Exploring the intersections of gender, race and ethnicity in unpaid care labor and paid labor in the U.S.](#)," Oxfam America, April 2024