

## COVID-19 AND VERMONT WOMEN MAY 28, 2020

### Women are Disproportionately Represented in Fields that are “Essential” and Therefore More Vulnerable to Becoming Ill

- Women in Vermont make up 91% of nurses, 82% of health care workers and 82% of personal care service workers (includes personal care aides and child care workers).<sup>[i]</sup>
  - In a survey to their membership (n=133), the Vermont chapter of the ANA found: 33.34% of members suggested that they disagree or strongly disagree about feeling adequately protected in their workplace. Even more members expressed concerns about their workplaces being equipped to handle COVID-19 cases; 43.94% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were prepared to handle COVID-19. 70 of 98 who commented on PPE on the survey said they are rationing or have a shortage.
  - Respondents’ concerns and stories included:
    - “Surgical masks have just about run out, fabric masks are not enough to protect us or our families from this virus. I’m afraid to go home after my shift because I am afraid to pass something to them even if I’m being extremely careful.”
    - “Tension at the hospital during this pandemic and having to decide not to see my kids in the meantime. I have not seen them for three weeks. Everything feels unbalanced.”
- As of June 1st, child care programs are allowed to reopen their operations, but serious questions about safety remain.
  - Child care programs, along with afterschool programs and summer camp programming have been given [Health Guidance](#) guidelines from DCF in order to safely reopen to serve children and families in the coming weeks/months.
  - There has been some initial pushback from the child care provider community about the severity of these guidelines – for instance, the suggestion that all children over 2 years old should wear masks, and that all adults working at the programs must wear masks.
  - There is also guidance that suggests staff should attempt to maintain social distance between children during “table time” and nap time, a potentially challenging feat according the early educators in this [Seven Days piece](#), and others.
  - There are ongoing concerns about the inability to reopen child care programs at their full capacities, and the potential long term implications for an already lacking supply of high-quality child care slots in the state.
- Currently, the Department of Health’s tracker for the virus suggests that 52.52% positive cases are women, compared to 47.17% in men. However, more men in the state are dying because of the virus.<sup>[ii]</sup>

### Women are More Likely Serving as Primary Caretakers and Homeschool Partners

- Vermont women are significantly more likely than men to live with minor children whether divorced, separated, or never married.
  - While 21.6% of separated men live with minor children, 43.9% of separated women do.<sup>[liii](#)</sup>
- Nationally, women are four times more likely to take time off and stay home when their children are sick.<sup>[lvi](#)</sup>
- Regardless of employment status, married mothers are much more likely to spend time on education-related activities with their children than married fathers.<sup>[lv](#)</sup>
- A Vermont woman shared this story with VCW:
  - “We have a 8 month old baby. Both parents work full time. No childcare for the past few months, which has been incredibly difficult, especially for me as the breastfeeding parent - I never get a break, and my work is suffering terribly. We don’t feel safe sending her back to her large daycare. I’m considering quitting my job. I’ve been there 6+ years. I worked so hard to get to this place in my career, and I already had to put grad school on hold when I got pregnant... This pandemic is exacerbating gender inequalities, based on my experience and that of my friends and colleagues.”

### Women are More at Risk of Being in, or Falling into Poverty

- Single female headed households are at much greater risk of poverty than single male households in Vermont.
  - 47.1% of Vermont households headed by women with minor children under five years old are in poverty, whereas 14% of male headed households with children under five are in poverty.<sup>[lvi](#)</sup>
  - Vermont women of color are more likely to live in poverty. The state’s poverty rates for Black and Asian women are above the national average.<sup>[lvii](#)</sup>

### Women are More Likely to Have their Incomes Impacted by COVID-19

- Data released from [Opportunity Insights](#) indicates that in Vermont, as of April 19 2020, there were 13.1 initial and continued unemployment claims per 100 people. This is the highest rate in the country. There is a national average of 6.43 claims per 100 people.
- An analysis done by [The Fuller Project](#) in April showed that the majority of unemployment claims nationwide were from women.
- The Vermont Department of Labor has not released a gender breakdown of Vermont’s unemployment claims but we are in ongoing communication with them and hope it will be forthcoming.
- Women are a significant majority of workers in 7 of the nation’s lowest-paying occupations.<sup>[lviii](#)</sup>
- Women in Vermont are more likely than men to be in part-time positions and make up a disproportionate share of those earning less than \$11 an hour.<sup>[lix](#)</sup>
  - These positions are much less likely to offer any sort of paid leave policy or the ability to work from home. 2017-2018 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that only 23.3% of part-time workers were offered paid leave benefits compared to 77% of full-time workers.<sup>[lxi](#)</sup>
- 81% of Vermont’s tipped workers are women, the highest rate in the country.<sup>[lxii](#)</sup>
  - With dine-in service closed statewide, these workers’ incomes or employment status altogether is at risk.
- Women business-owners are more likely to own smaller businesses than their male counterparts. Women-run businesses are also more likely to be in the service sector, providing

things such as health, education, personal or retail services, all business-types likely to be impacted by the current economic climate.<sup>[xii]</sup>

### **Women are More at Risk of Domestic and Sexual Violence**

- 33.6% of Vermont women experience intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner rape and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes.<sup>[xiii]</sup>
- The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence believes there will be an increased risk for those experiencing sexual and domestic violence during this time due to isolation.
- Some counties have already seen increases in domestic reports being filed. In Washington county, there were 7 reports filed in the span of 7 days, versus the 10 reports filed in the months of January and February combined.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

### **Pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum**

- Our research on this is ongoing, but some concerns are:
  - hospital birthing policies, including pregnant people being denied the right to have a companion adult with them when they deliver, mandatory c-section requirements, access to pain medication, separation of mother-baby dyad, and safety protocols
  - out of hospital birth options including pop-up birth clinics, emergency home-birth policies, doula care
  - perinatal mental health complications caused by COVID-19 related stress and the potential impact on birth outcomes
  - ensuring protection for pregnant workers at risk of exposure to COVID-19
  - shortages in formula, diapers and other essential needs for infants

### **Incarcerated women**

- Concerns include:
  - Decarceration without adequate community supports
  - Access to communications within the facility
  - Access to children
  - Health and safety in the facility, including access to alcohol-based hand sanitizer which has not been consistent, based on news reports
  - DIVAS program operating adequately
  - Mental health care in a time of increased need

### **Family Law – custody issues**

Concerns:

- Inconsistencies in judges' decisions if there is no guidance from supreme court or judiciary
- That essential workers, especially healthcare workers, the majority of whom are women, will lose the ability to see their children for extended periods because of the critical role they play in our society, and that these decisions will further contribute to the trauma experienced by parents and children during this time.
- That if orders are not expressly temporary, and don't specify what circumstances would trigger the resumption of the permanent, original order, parents could face lengthy, costly battles to see their children again
- That some abusive ex-partners and parents will use this as an opportunity to undermine their children's bond with their other parent

- VCW received an Information & Referral service request for help from a woman who is an essential worker and a single mother with 100% custody, and her ex was taking her to court to remove custody permanently based on her line of work.

<sup>ii</sup> Change the Story, "Women, Work, and Wages."

<sup>iii</sup> Vermont Department of Health, "Coronavirus (COVID-19): Current Activity in Vermont," Vermont Department of Health, April 5, 2020, <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19/current-activity-vermont>.

<sup>iiii</sup> Change the Story, "2019 Status Report: Women, Work, and Wages in Vermont," 2019, <https://changethestoryvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WomenWorkWages2019.pdf>.

<sup>iv</sup> Usha Ranji and 2014, "Data Note: Balancing on Shaky Ground: Women, Work and Family Health," *The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation* (blog), October 20, 2014, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/data-note-balancing-on-shaky-ground-women-work-and-family-health/>.

<sup>v</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "American Time Use Survey," 2017 2013, <https://www.bls.gov/tus/#tables>.

<sup>vi</sup> Change the Story, "Women, Work, and Wages."

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<sup>x</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "American Time Use Survey."

<sup>xi</sup> Change the Story, "Women, Work, and Wages."

<sup>xii</sup> Minnesota Office on the Economic Status of Women, "Why Are Women-Owned Businesses Overall Smaller than Men-Owned Businesses?," August 2016, <https://www.oesw.leg.mn/PDFdocs/Why%20do%20women%20start%20disproportionately%20fewer%20businesses%20than%20men%20owned%20.pdf>.

<sup>xiii</sup> National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, "Domestic Violence in Vermont," 2016, [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/vermont\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/vermont_2019.pdf).

<sup>xiv</sup> Sarah Asch, "Authorities Worry Distancing Efforts Could Lead to Rise in Domestic Violence," *VT Digger*, March 23, 2020, <https://vtdigger.org/2020/03/23/authorities-worry-distancing-efforts-could-lead-to-rise-in-domestic-violence/>.