

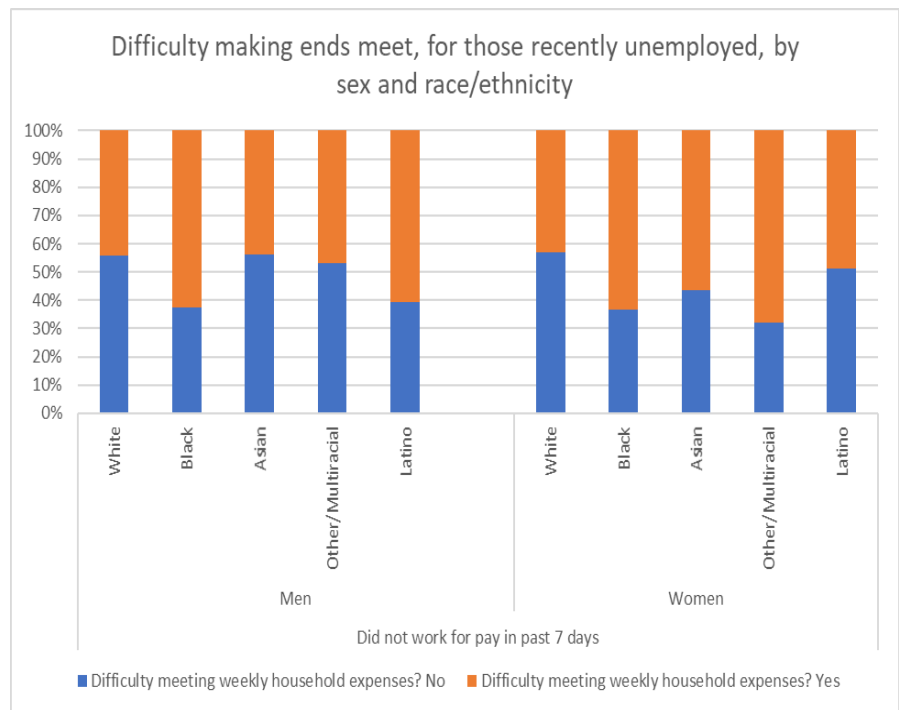
Policy Brief

Washington Workers in the Pandemic: Women Hit Harder by Care Burden, Struggle to Pay Bills; Men Hit Harder by COVID Illness, Loss of Insurance

By Mike Mulcahy, Working Title Research and David West, WA Labor Education & Research Center, March 29, 2021

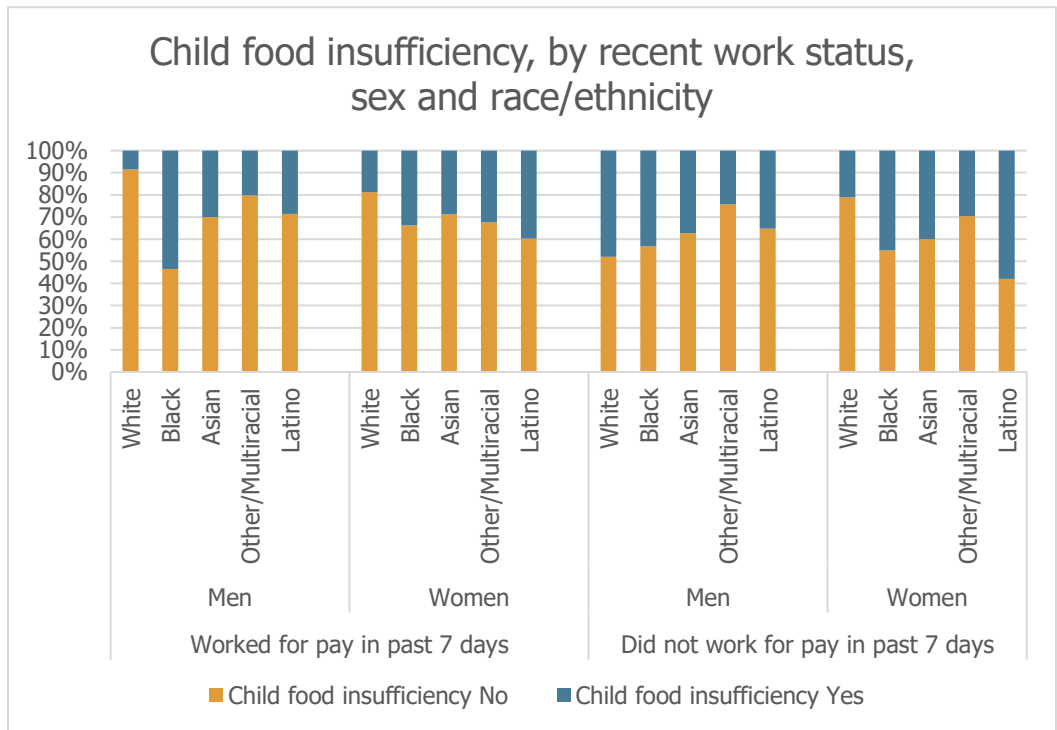
In our previous reports on the Washington workers in the pandemic, we reported on how occupations dominated by women and workers of color face higher COVID risks as well as low wages, higher unemployment and other economic stress. In this brief, we report on our research using the Census Bureau's 2020 *Household Pulse Surveys* (HPS)ⁱ to further analyze what's happened to Washington workers. The PULSE data was collected in three phases—Phase 1 from April 23 to July 21, 2020; Phase 2 from August 19 to Oct. 26, 2020; Phase 3 began Oct. 28 and continues through March 2021.

- Unpaid Care Forces Women from Workforceⁱⁱ** - Women have left the paid workforce in higher numbers (21% of women vs. 8% of men) to do unpaid care for family members. About 23-25% of women of color reported not working in the previous week to care for family members, compared to 18% for white women.
- Women Cite More Loss of Work** - Women in the Washington labor force were more likely (31.5%) than men (24%) to report not having worked for pay in the previous seven days throughout the pandemic. About 40% of African Americans reported no paid work in the past seven days, followed by Multiracial/other and Latinx respondents (33 and 31.5%, respectively).
- Latinx Households Hit Hard** - Women were more likely than men to report that someone in their household had experienced loss of employment since the beginning of the pandemic. About 59% of Latinx respondents reported loss of work for at least one of the adults in the household since March, followed by 58% of Multiracial/other, and 57% of Black respondents.
- Women Struggle to Make Ends Meet** - Women were more likely than men to say that they had had trouble meeting typical household expenses in the past seven days (31% of women vs. 25.5% of men). 45% of African American women and Latinas reported struggling to make ends meet. White men were least likely to report financial difficulties (22%).
- Men Hit Harder by COVID Illness** We also found an alarming 25% of black men and 24% of Latinos reported having stayed home from work in the previous week due to illness – in the vast majority of cases, particularly for Latinos, due to COVID symptoms.



- **Latinas Hit Hardest Paying Bills** - As the pandemic continued, larger percentages of Latinas and multiracial/other women reported increasing financial difficulties, while financial problems for white, black, and Asian women decreased over the year. In contrast, men of all races/ethnicities reported financial difficulties increasing during the year, with the largest increases for Latinos and multiracial/other men.

- **Food Insecurity Up** - By the end of 2020, women who had not worked for pay in the previous seven days were much more likely (14%) than recently unemployed males (10%) to report recent reliance on free food. Similarly, households where at least one adult had experienced unemployment since March 2020 had to rely more on free food. Latinas (12%) and Black women (11%), as well as Latinos (11%) who *did* work for pay in the past week had the largest proportions reliant on free food in the previous week. Of those recently out of work, 27% of Latinas and 20.5% of Latinos reported using free food sources.



- **Families Not Able to Feed Children** - Rates of child food insufficiency reached a staggering 49% among Latina, and 31% among Latino respondents, 48% among black men and 40% among black female women, compared to about 20% among white men and women.

Men Lack Health Insurance in Greater Numbers - men in the Washington labor force are consistently and significantly more likely than women to report having no health insurance coverage. About 10% of the male labor force participants in this subsample had no health insurance, compared to about 7% of women. Racial differences on health insurance are larger. 18% of Latinas and 17% of Latinos report having no health insurance, higher than other races/ethnicities in WA.

For more findings, complete results, and methodology, see the full version of this Labor Center Policy Brief at the WA Labor and Education Center's website, www.walaborcenter.org.



About the Washington Labor Education and Research Center

The Labor Education and Research Center delivers high-quality education, training programs and research for the working women and men of Washington State. As a unique program within higher education, we use the best practices of adult education and applied research to serve our dynamic and diverse labor force, including the new Rights at Work Washington website (www.RightsatWorkWA.org).

ⁱ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/technical-documentation.html>

ⁱⁱ We combined detailed HPS response categories to distinguish between four major types of reasons selected by respondents in the WA labor force to explain why they had not worked in the past seven days: business/employer disruptions due to pandemic; care-giving work at home due to pandemic; sickness or disability (including COVID19 symptoms), and "other".