

# COVID-19 pandemic has hit women hard, especially working mothers

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*Job losses, childcare duties and mental distress have disproportionately affected women since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, according to new results from Understanding Coronavirus in America tracking survey.*

**Contact:** Jenesse Miller, (213) 810-8554 or [jenessem@usc.edu](mailto:jenessem@usc.edu) or Jim Key, (619) 253-1077 or [jameskey@dornsife.usc.edu](mailto:jameskey@dornsife.usc.edu)

A new analysis of the USC Dornsife's Understanding Coronavirus in America Study has found that women, particularly those without a college degree, suffered more job losses than men and bore significantly greater responsibility for childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scientists at the [USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research \(CESR\)](#), which conducts the study, found one-third of working mothers in two-parent households reported they were the only ones providing care for their children, compared to one-tenth of working fathers. Higher levels of psychological distress have also emerged among women with children, compared to women without children and to men with or without children.

Study author and adjunct CESR senior economist [Gema Zamarro](#) said there are several reasons the current COVID-19 crisis and the coinciding recession have disproportionately affected women.

First, the pandemic has devastated service-oriented sectors that employ more women like restaurants, hotels and hospitality, leading to more job losses, she said. Secondly, as schools and daycares closed and as stay-at-home orders made it difficult for family members like grandparents to help, childcare needs soared.

“Considering women already shouldered a greater burden for childcare prior to the pandemic, it’s unsurprising the demands are now even greater,” said Zamarro, who is also a professor at the University of Arkansas. “While men are more likely to die from infection by COVID-19, overall the pandemic has had a disproportionately detrimental impact on the mental health of women, particularly those with kids.”

*Interview with Gema Zamarro available here: <https://youtu.be/E5tEEp419UI>*

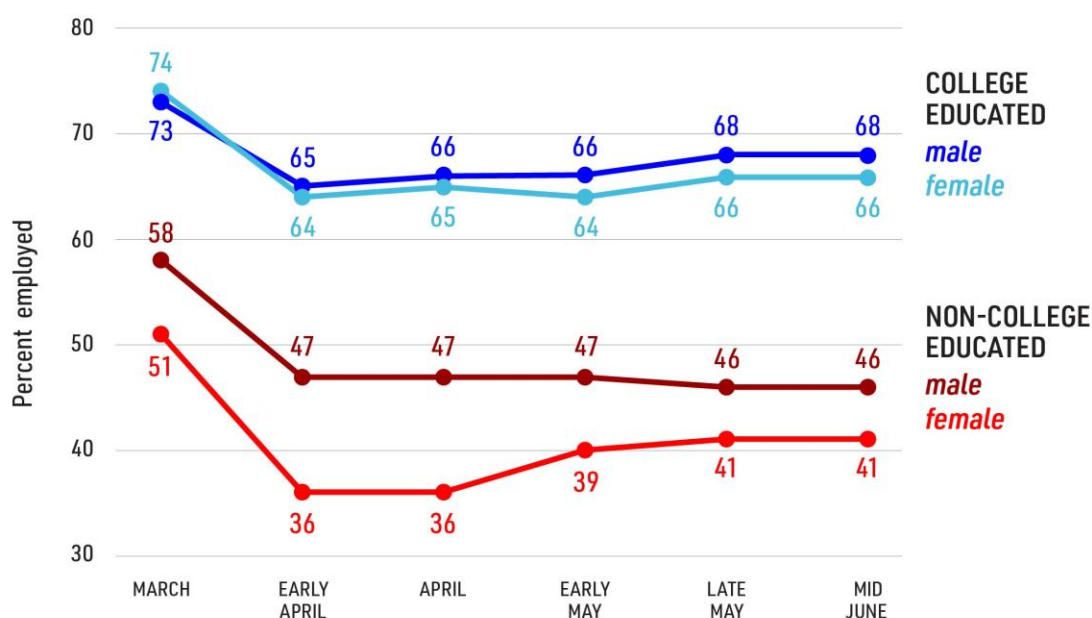
The full report is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/CESRGenderDiffs>

## COVID-19 associated with greater job losses for less-educated women

### Understanding Coronavirus in America

USC  
Dornsife  
Center for Economic  
and Social Research

#### Job losses hit non-college educated women the hardest



A total of 6,824 members of the probability-based Understanding America Study participated in six tracking survey waves from March 10 - June 16, 2020. Sample sizes and margins of sampling error for this population are available at: [tinyurl.com/CESRGenderDiffs](https://tinyurl.com/CESRGenderDiffs). For full question text, methodology, topline, and data, visit: [covid19pulse.usc.edu](https://covid19pulse.usc.edu)

Since the start of the pandemic, less educated women have suffered the greatest job losses, the results show. They suffered a 15 percentage-point drop in employment in early April compared to March; while men without college degrees during that same period experienced an 11-point drop.

Although states, counties and cities are reopening, as of early June, just 41% of non-college educated women and 46% of men were employed.

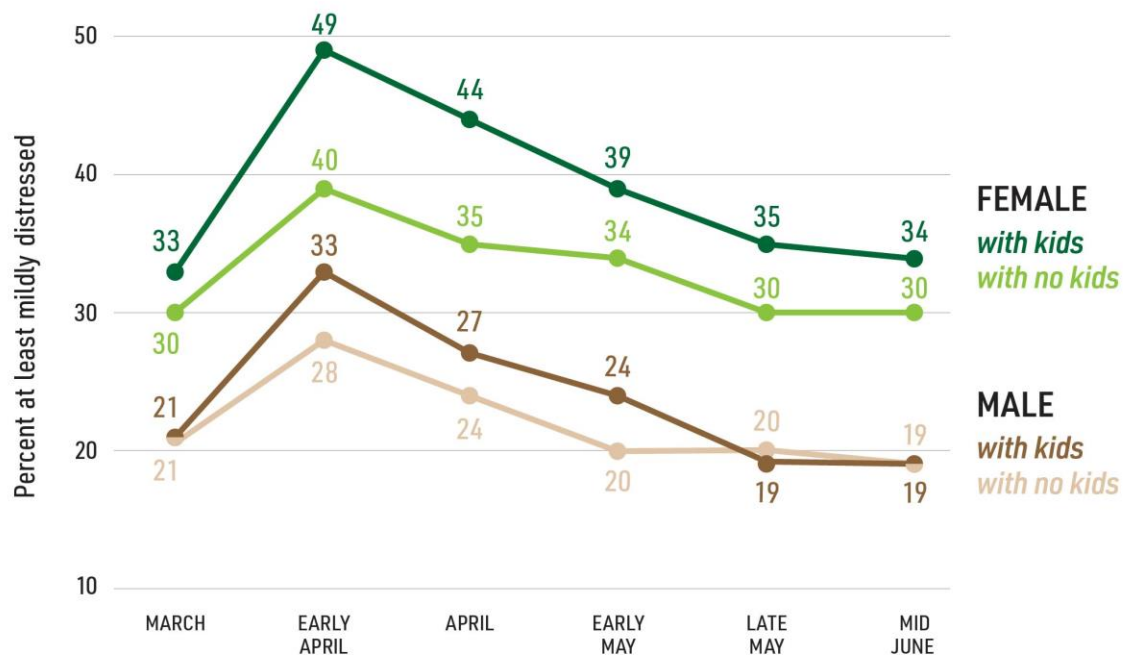
Meanwhile, college-educated men and women are experiencing job losses at similar rates: employment for both dropped from about 74% to 67%.

## A new gap emerges in women's emotional distress

# Understanding Coronavirus in America

USC  
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## Women with kids most likely to experience psychological distress



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Women have long reported higher levels of psychological distress than men, but the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with even greater feelings of anxiety and depression among women with children.

Moms reported a huge spike in psychological distress in early April, compared to women without kids and to all men. The level steadily eased through early June to pre-pandemic levels, but women remain disproportionately impacted.

By early June, just 19% of men – with and without kids – reported being at least mildly distressed, compared to 30% of women without kids and 34% of women who are moms.

### **Women more heavily tasked with childcare during coronavirus crisis**

The analysis found more women than men took on childcare duties after schools closed in response to the coronavirus: 44% of women in early April reported being the only household member providing care, compared to 14% of men.

The disparity was notable among working parents, including those working from home: 1 in 3 working mothers in early April reported that they were the main caregiver, vs. 1 in 10 working fathers.

Working college-educated mothers also reduced their working hours compared to women who have no young children and in comparison to men. The drop in work hours was the greatest among college-educated parents of young children. By early June, 64% of college-educated mothers reported that they had reduced their working hours at some point since March, vs. 36% of college-educated fathers and 52% of college educated-women without young children.

### **About the Understanding Coronavirus in America survey**

Since mid-March, CESR's researchers have surveyed a panel of around 7,000 U.S. adults regarding their perceptions and attitudes about coronavirus and the impact of coronavirus on their lives. Graphs from the biweekly tracking survey, which is supported in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and USC, are updated daily and available to researchers and the public at: [covid19pulse.usc.edu](https://covid19pulse.usc.edu).

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*Image via iStock*