

WORKTRENDS

AMERICANS' ATTITUDES ABOUT WORK, EMPLOYERS, AND GOVERNMENT

Thoughts on the Women's Recession

**Comparing Women and Men on Attitudes about the Economy,
Politics, and their Families during the Pandemic**

Sean Simone, Ph.D.

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HELDRICH CENTER
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RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

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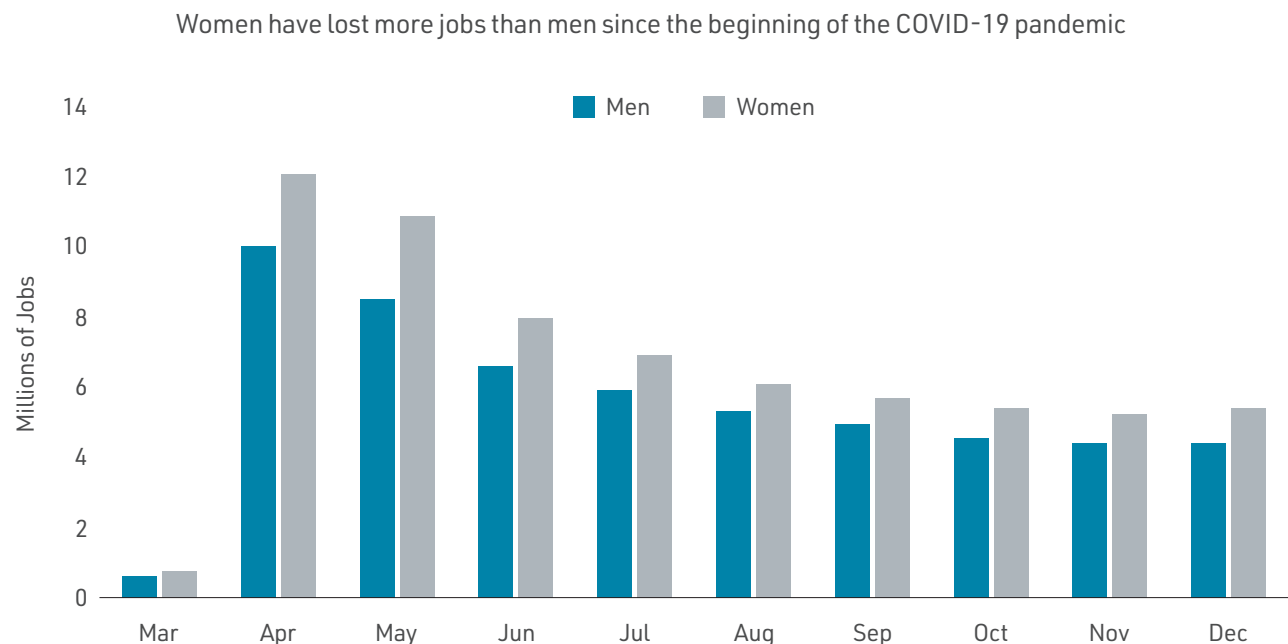
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In the latest Work Trends survey from the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, evidence suggests that women are more concerned about economically supporting themselves or their families compared to men. They also report a higher amount of stress in their everyday lives. These differences are likely the result of the disproportionate impacts of job loss by women during the pandemic-induced recession. On measures asking about their opinions of the country's political climate and economic conditions, women and men are statistically the same. However, women are more likely than men to be optimistic that the political parties will work together in the next year to strengthen the economy.

More Women have Lost Jobs than Men

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women have lost nearly one million more jobs than men since the beginning of the pandemic. While job loss recovered in the summer and fall of 2020, women lost 150,000 more jobs in December 2020 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of Jobs Lost Since the Beginning of the Pandemic, by Sex, March to December 2020



Source: 2020 Current Employment Statistics Survey (Series ID CES0000000010). Count of nonfarm employees. Analysis by authors.

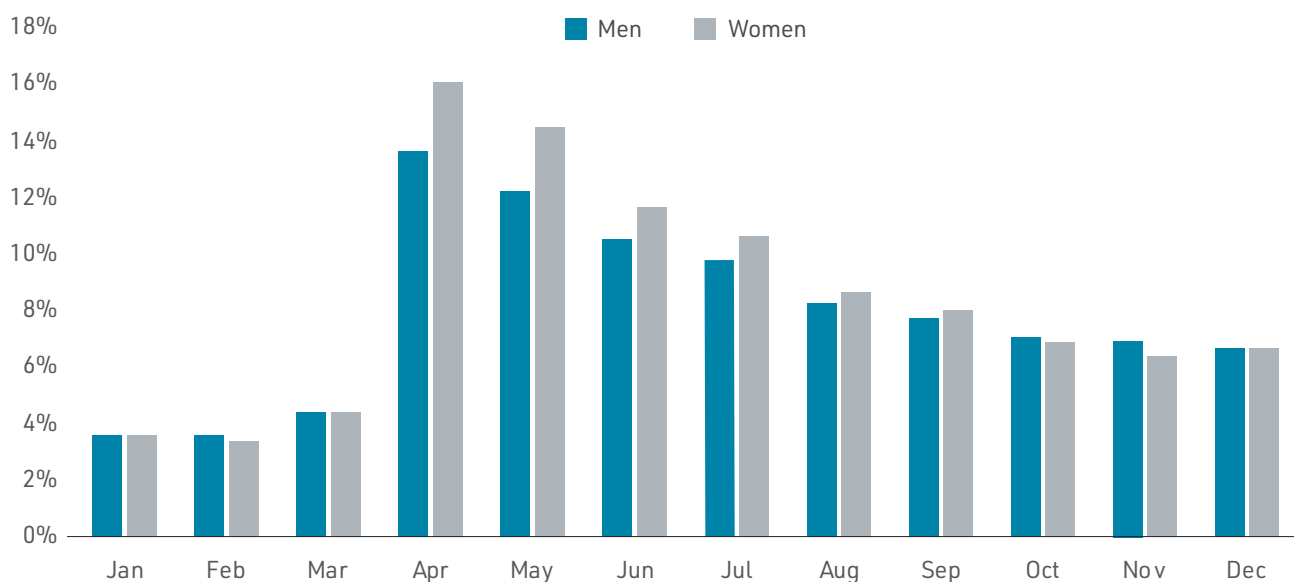
Unemployment Stabilized from the Closures in the Spring, but Women have Not yet Gained Parity with Men

In the early stages of the recession, researchers noted that women were disproportionately affected compared to men. Unemployment for women early in the recession was 2.9% higher on average in 2020, which is a significant departure from previous recessions where men were more likely to be negatively affected.¹

Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that the labor market has stabilized (see Figure 2). In January and February 2020, the unemployment rate for men and women remained the same at nearly 3.5%. In March 2020, unemployment increased for both groups to 4.4%, then diverged. At its peak in April, the rate for women was higher than for men (16.1% for women compared to 13.6% for men). The rates remained different until the fall of 2020, where they converged to 6.7% by December. However, 300,000 more women have left the labor force than men compared to January 2020.

Figure 2: Unemployment Rate, by Sex, 2020

Women experienced higher unemployment early in the recession, but recovered later in 2020



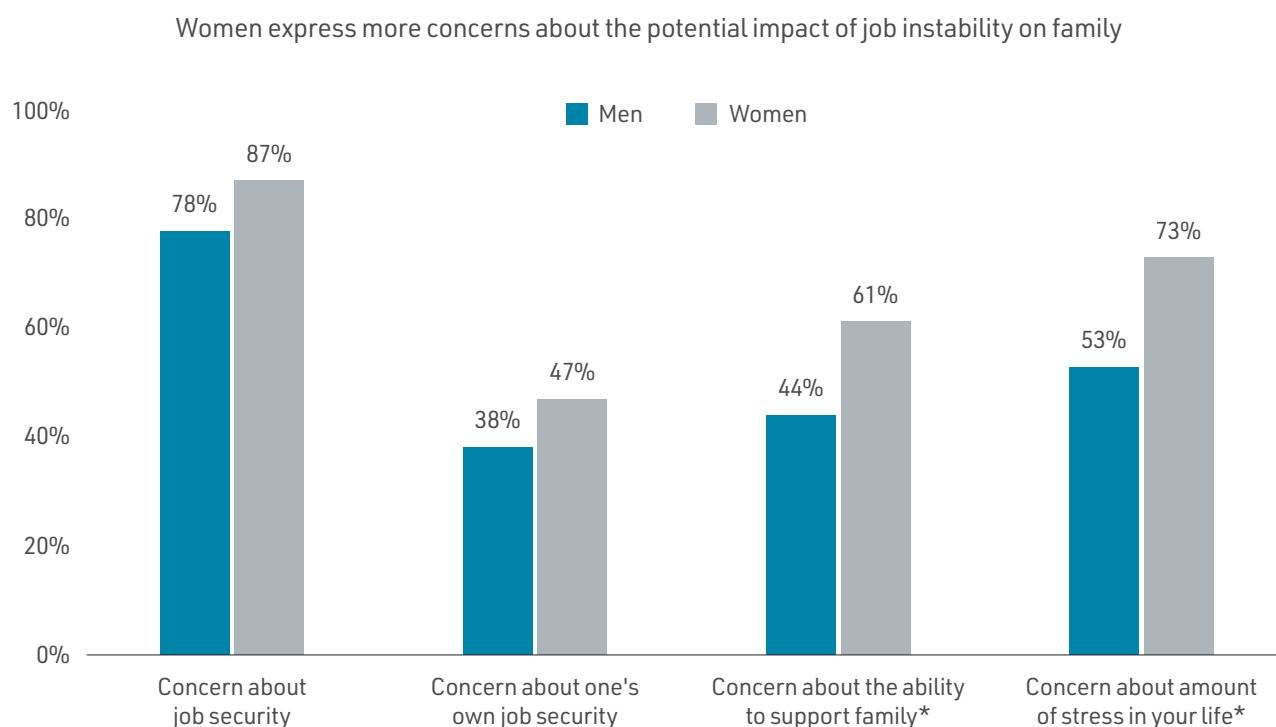
Source: Table A-2. *Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age: January-December 2020*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Analysis by authors.

¹ Alon, T., Deopke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). *The shecession (she-recession) of 2020: Causes and consequences*. Center for Economic and Policy Research Vox Portal. <https://voxeu.org/article/shecession-she-recession-2020-causes-and-consequences>

Recent Work Trends Survey Results Show Women are More Concerned than Men about the Impacts of the Unstable Economy on Family and Stress

Almost 9 in 10 women (87%) and approximately 8 in 10 men (78%) had concerns about job security while almost 5 in 10 women (47%) and approximately 4 in 10 men (38%) were concerned about their own job security. The differences between women and men when asked about impacts on their own households is significant; 17% more women had concerns about financially supporting their family than men and 20% more women indicated they are very or somewhat concerned about the amount of stress in their life (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of Respondents who Expressed Concerns about Job Security, Family, and Stress, by Sex, December 2020



Based on N=810 to 814

* indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$

Concern about one's own job security based on women and men who are employed (N=213 for employed women and N=248 for employed men).

Concern is defined as reporting being very concerned or somewhat concerned.

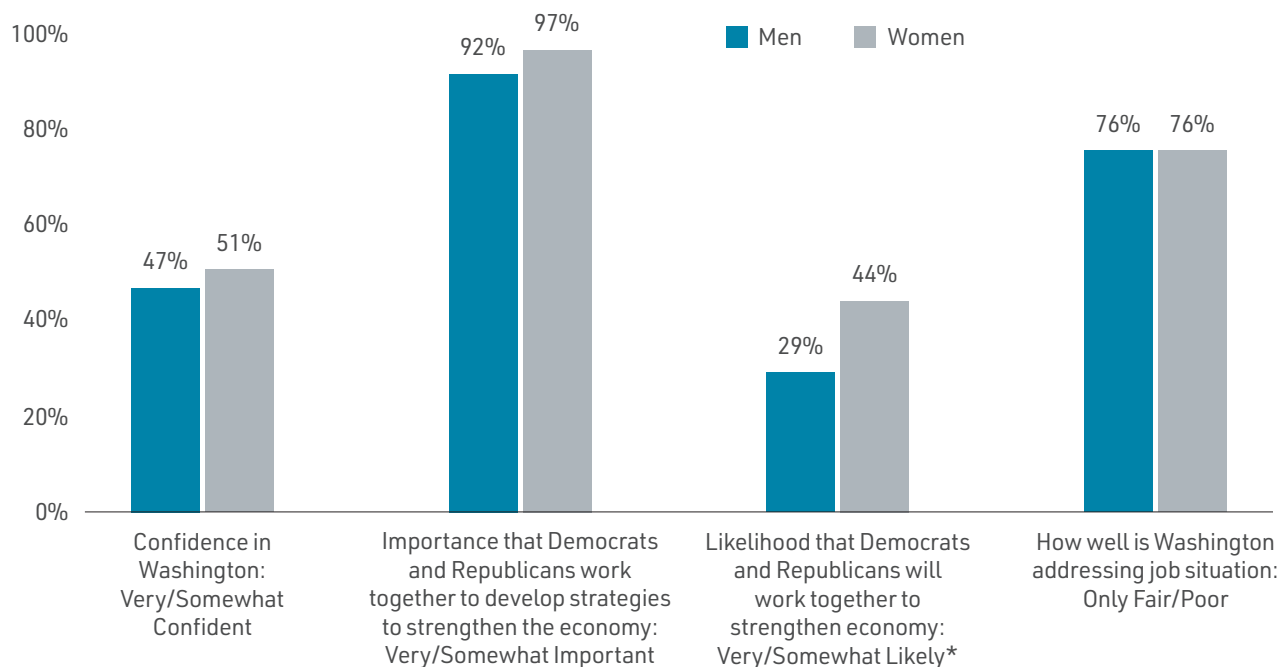
Both Women and Men Agree on the Economic and Political Situation in Washington, D.C.

Women and men generally had similar views on the political situation in Washington, D.C. (see Figure 4). Nearly half of both groups said they had confidence in Washington (51% of women and 47% of men); nearly all thought it was important for Democrats and Republicans to get along (97% and 92%, respectively), and just below 8 in 10 felt that politicians were doing a poor job to address the job situation (76% each).

While fewer than half of women and men were optimistic that Democrats and Republicans would work together to strengthen the economy, more women than men thought that change was likely (44% versus 29%).

Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents Sharing Opinions about the Political Climate in Washington, D.C., by Sex, December 2020

There are no statistically significant differences by sex on opinions about the political climate in Washington, D.C., but women are more likely to think Democrats and Republicans will work together in the next year to strengthen the economy

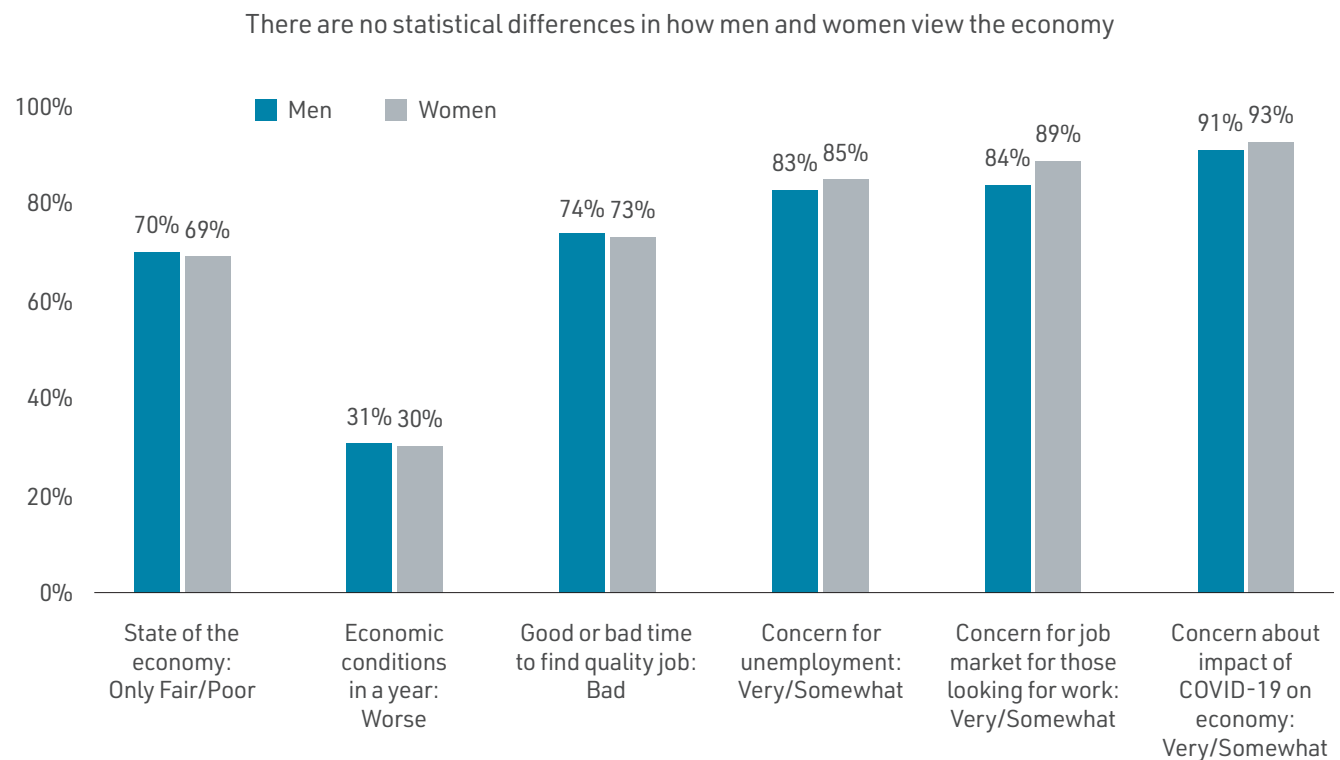


Based on N=809 to 814

* indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$

Women and men also had the same views on the economy (see Figure 5). Both groups assessed that the state of the economy was only fair or poor (69% for women and 70% for men), that it is a bad time to look for a quality job (73% and 74%, respectively), have a concern for unemployment (85% and 83%, respectively), and have concerns in the job market for those losing jobs (89% and 84%, respectively). Three in 10 women and men believe that economic conditions will be worse next year (30% and 31%, respectively).

Figure 5: Percentage of Respondents' Opinions about the Economy, by Sex, December 2020



Based on N=809 to 813

Appendix A: Methodology Statement and Sample Composition

This issue brief is based on the results of a national probability survey of 814 American adults age 18 and over fielded online between December 4 and 14, 2020 by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population (see Table A-1). See the Heldrich Center's January 2021 report [Twin Crises](#) for complete methodology information.

Table A-1: Sample Composition by Age, December 2020

	Unweighted Sample Size	Margin of Error
Male	404	± 5.35%
Female	410	± 5.31%

Background

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey was founded as a research and policy organization devoted to strengthening New Jersey's and the nation's workforce during a time of global economic change. The Heldrich Center researches and puts to work strategies that increase worker skills and employability, strengthen the ability of companies to compete, create jobs where they are needed, and improve the quality and performance of the workforce development system. Since 1997, the Heldrich Center has experienced rapid growth, working with federal and state government partners, Fortune 100 companies, and major foundations. The center embodies its slogan "Solutions at Work" by teaming with partners and clients to translate cutting-edge research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, unions, schools, community-based organizations, and government officials can leverage to strengthen the nation's workforce.

Since its inception, the Heldrich Center has sought to inform employers, union leaders, policymakers, community members, the media, and academic communities about critical workforce and education issues that relate to the emerging global economy. To better understand the public's attitudes about work, employers, and the government, and improve workplace practices and policy, the Heldrich Center produces the Work Trends surveys on a regular basis. (The complete set of reports is available at www.heldrich.rutgers.edu). The surveys poll the general public on critical workforce issues facing Americans and American businesses. The survey findings are promoted widely to the media and national constituencies. The series is directed by Carl E. Van Horn, Ph.D., Director of the Heldrich Center and Distinguished Professor of Public Policy at Rutgers University.

Thoughts on the Women's Recession continues to advance the goals of the Work Trends series to give American workers a voice in the national economic policy debates, and thereby provides policymakers and employers with reliable insights into how workers across the nation are judging and acting upon the realities of work and the workplace.

The author of this brief was Sean Simone, Ph.D. Kristine Joy Bacani, Brittney Donovan, Nathan Satish, and Jessica Starace, MPP assisted with the data analysis. InBum Chung was the graphic designer. Robb C. Sewell edited the brief.