

Women were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. We can make it right by choosing a government that will make social and economic gender equity a national priority.

Women need to be at the forefront of a pandemic recovery that leaves no one behind.

Millions of Canadians were suddenly thrown out of work when the pandemic struck.

Women were affected more than men. They experienced higher levels of job losses and economic hardship. This divide was felt even more by women from marginalized communities such as women living with disabilities, racialized women, Black women, Indigenous women, lesbians, bisexuals, trans and non-binary people.

Women who worked through the pandemic also faced greater health risks and increased exposure to the virus. Women – many of them racialized or new Canadians – make up a greater portion of the frontline healthcare and customer service workforce.

Pay equity

In Ontario, women aged 25 to 54 lost their jobs twice as often as men did when the pandemic first hit in March 2020. As the province gradually reopened, men went back to work at a much higher rate than women.

This made the effects of Canada's wage gap even worse.

Full-time working women already make only 89 cents for every dollar men make. This gap is even larger for racialized, Black, and Indigenous women, women living with disabilities, elderly women, and those who identify as LGBTQ2+. Women's lower earning power means they are at a higher risk of falling into poverty if they have children and then become separated,

divorced, or widowed. They are less able to save for their retirement and more likely to be poor in their senior years. In fact, women 65 or over are more likely than their male counterparts to live on a low income.

Social equality

Women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic both at work and at home.

Sexual harassment increased for many women who shifted to remote work when the pandemic began.

Approximately 45 per cent of women experiencing sexual harassment say it happens remotely, and 23 per cent of women who have experienced harassment say it has increased since they started working from home.

Reports of domestic violence also increased in 2020. Lockdowns, social distancing, and isolation meant that women experiencing domestic violence had less access to the support of friends, family, social supports and healthcare.

Child care

Because women on average make less than their male counterparts, when schools in many parts of the country closed, women were often forced to leave the labour force to assume caregiving responsibilities. This set back their careers and worsened the pay gap.

Women in the academic sector, including many PSAC members, were significantly impacted. A heavier online teaching load, combined with caregiving responsibilities, exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities. This led to reduced employment security in an already insecure sector of the workforce.

The way forward

As part of our pandemic recovery, the government is negotiating child care funding agreements with many provinces. The funding is designed to help create more daycare spaces which all parents can access and afford.

This is long overdue. Affordable child care enhances children's well-being, increases women's participation in the job market, promotes gender equality, and grows the economy.

It's not a tough sell. Universal child care would allow 750,000 women to go back to work and contribute to the economy, more than covering the cost of the program.

We need to support parties that will continue to build and fund a universal, accessible and affordable child care system.

But Erin O'Toole and the Conservatives have said they will cancel universal child care. They want to take a step backwards to a Stephen Harper-era system of giving mere tax breaks to parents.

This does nothing to solve the underlying issue: there are not enough affordable high-quality child care spaces to go around. The Conservative plan will increase demand for child care without increasing supply.

We know what happens next: affordable child care will be left out of reach for millions of Canadians.

Equality for all

We need a government that will continue to invest in child care, work to level the playing field for all women, and make gender equity a national priority.

