



The Pandemic's Economic Impact on Women Everywhere

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With funding from the Research Experience and Apprenticeship Program (REAP) at the University of New Hampshire, I conducted research on the economic and societal impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women. I began by reading over twenty-five news articles about current events and statistics on the impact of the pandemic, which gave me a general overview of the problems we are facing. This also provided context for the next phase of my research into feminist philosophy concepts and their role in society.

I read extremely challenging academic chapters on feminist philosophy from *The Feminist Philosophy Reader* published by Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo, *Analyzing Oppression* by Ann E. Cudd, and *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published by Edward N. Zalta. I also read chapters of *Categorically Unequal* by the sociologist Douglas Massey. From these readings I gained a thorough understanding of feminist philosophy and the historical treatment of women.

I then studied intersectionality, which is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender. I was able to utilize a series of resources for my understanding of this topic, most notably a video from the founder of the term, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, who is a black feminist scholar. This helped me to understand the ways different women experience oppression. The layers of oppression are not simply additive, they are cumulative. People are often placed into boxes where they are having to pick one or the other, but who they are is truly a combination that cannot be split. Black women for instance experience different forms of racism than black men as well as a different form of sexism than white women. This showed me the importance of solving societal issues with an intersectional approach that helps support all people.

Following my reading on intersectionality, I dove deeper into how COVID-19 seriously disrupted women's progress for equality and equity. I distilled the information I had gathered from prior resources in addition to accessing new sources. The pandemic struck women and women with children the hardest. I researched the global implications, as well as the predominant issues that occurred in New Hampshire, many of which were reported on by New Hampshire Public Radio. I learned how issues that erupted during the pandemic have always been underlying in society. The imbalance of caretaking responsibilities among gender roles, the lack of quality childcare and eldercare as well as lack of feminist epistemology in science and in medicine have all led to a situation of dire inequality. Women have been shuffling the burden of care and work for too long without any outside assistance and have taken up three times more unpaid care work than men since the pandemic started. It was clear that the pandemic sent women backward economically, but also in terms of mental and physical health. Domestic abuse

skyrocketed during the pandemic, which demonstrates the physical and psychological harm that this pandemic has further imposed upon women.

Pandemic Response

Cross-comparison against other countries as well as states and how they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic was the next portion of my research journey. Many countries took this situation and saw it as a chance to promote real change by putting forth policies to invest in a more equitable future for women and girls. Canada started to invest in affordable childcare and started to craft a feminist response fund. Argentina was able to start to combat the soaring amount of domestic violence in the country. Hawaii has also started to put forth bold economic policy which focuses on having a feminist response plan to combat the growing inequality. However, it was overwhelming clear that the United States is not doing enough to allow for an equitable recovery to the pandemic.

The pandemic will lead to long-term damage if not addressed promptly with a response plan that focuses on an equitable economic recovery. Women dropped out of the labor force to take care of their families and their children. Now that school and care facilities have reopened, women must be recruited by companies and encouraged to rejoin the workforce after many were forced to resign. If this does not occur, future generations of women mentors that craft women leaders are lost.

How to Create a More Just Society

Throughout my research period, I wrote weekly summaries as well as reflections to demonstrate how my understanding grew on the different economic and philosophical concepts. After discussing ideas with my mentor, the significance of my research for the disciplines of philosophy and economics became clear.

Women have been exploited by society for the current system to function and run seamlessly. As women gain more career opportunities, they struggle to manage society's unrealistic expectations. Care work has not been split equally between men and women, and this has led to women losing out economically by not being able to pursue their professional and family dreams. Men, however, often continue their careers without the care needs of others impacting their future success. This is unjust for women who want to pursue a family and a career but cannot fully do both without one harming the other due to the burden of care being unfairly placed on them.

However, it does not need to be this way. Society could allow for men and women to share their care responsibilities equally. Workplaces could slowly stop their androcentric work norms and understand that no matter their employees' gender or age, they have care responsibilities outside the workplace that need to be validated. Childcare should be a public good, and systems should adjust so that both men and women can pursue their careers without having to choose between their family's needs and their own success.

To complete my research, I wrote a long piece about how the default system does not work for women, and how it favors men's needs and norms. The first draft outlined possible paths of further research and provided a starting point to create a more concise piece. This allowed me to combine weeks of research into a more tangible and continuous idea that can spark change. My opinion piece, published in the Women's Media Center, focuses on how the pandemic constrained women and describes why a feminist pandemic response could allow society to become more just.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me throughout the application process for the first-year Research Experience and Apprenticeship Program (REAP) as well as the research project itself. Thank you to my mentor, Professor Nina Windgätter, for being an amazing professor during my first semester of college as well as throughout the entirety of the REAP experience; your ability to inspire to learn more about the world around me is incomparable. I would also like to thank my honors course professor, Robert Mohr, for agreeing to nominate me for this research opportunity. In addition, I am thankful to my friends and family who pushed me to follow through with a project I was passionate about it. Finally, I would like to thank the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research and Dana Hamel specifically for funding this research opportunity.

AUTHOR AND MENTOR BIOS

Johanne Nichols is a finance and economics major from Concord, New Hampshire. She is in the University Honors Program, the Alpha Kappa Psi coed business fraternity, and Paul College's Atkins Investment Group. She expects to graduate in May 2024. Johanne designed her project for the Research Apprenticeship and Experience Program (REAP) after seeing neighbors—especially women—quit their jobs to take care of their young children whose schooling became remote due to the pandemic. Researching during the 2020 pandemic went well because it was largely literature based, but it also taught her “the importance of communication and seeking additional clarification when needed.” Johanne says that through the research process she learned about the importance of first drafts, as well as of seeking mentorship. She also learned how social expectations of women can hold them back and lead to many women having to go above and beyond in every aspect of their life. Johanne's career goals are to continue researching the impact that policy can have on society as well as the economy. She knows that the experience of revising her op-ed through a series of drafts was a learning experience that will transfer over well to graduate school.



Nina Windgätter is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of New Hampshire, College of Liberal Arts. Dr. Windgätter's research is at the intersection of social and political philosophy and social epistemology. It focuses on the problems of social stratification in our world and what we ought to do about them. She is also very passionate about pedagogy and strives to teach classes that are meaningful for her students' lives.