



# **A Feminist Perspective on COVID-19 and the Value of Care Work**

**Yana van der Meulen Rodgers**  
**Faculty Director, Center for Women and Work**

**AAUW Panel Discussion**  
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# Introduction

- Gendered dimensions of COVID-19
  - Men's disadvantage in morbidity and mortality
  - High representation of women in jobs on the front lines
    - Especially nurses, nursing assistants, home health aides, low-wage essential jobs
    - Many are women of color
  - More job losses for women
    - Women disproportionately represented in hardest hit industries
  - Greater unpaid care work burden for women

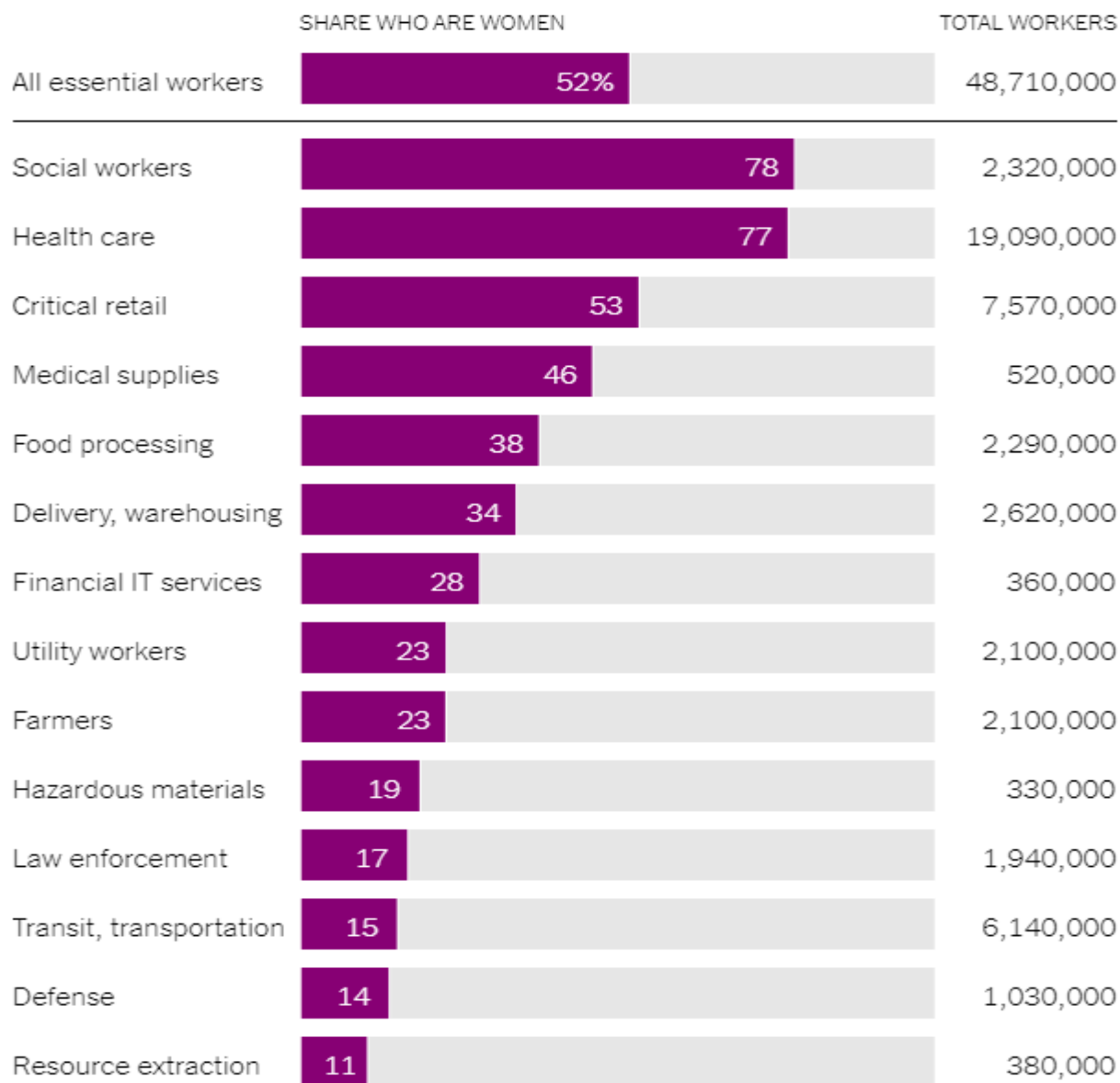
# Introduction

- Crisis points a spotlight on need for care
  - Medical care by paid healthcare workers
  - Care in the home
- Care work often undervalued and invisible
- Women's disproportionate role in performing care work a key long-term issue in feminist economics
  - Valuable lessons for shaping policies as the U.S. and other countries navigate the economic fallout and COVID-19 recovery period

## Recent Findings

- Over-representation of women and minorities in frontline care jobs
- Unemployment by gender and race
- Time use and unpaid care work at home
- Paid care workers during the pandemic

## Share of Essential Workers Who Are Women



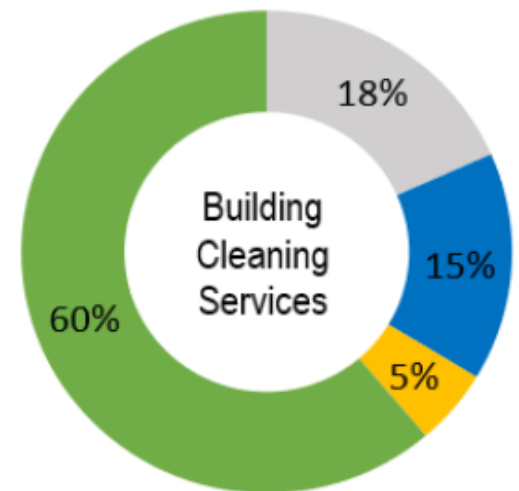
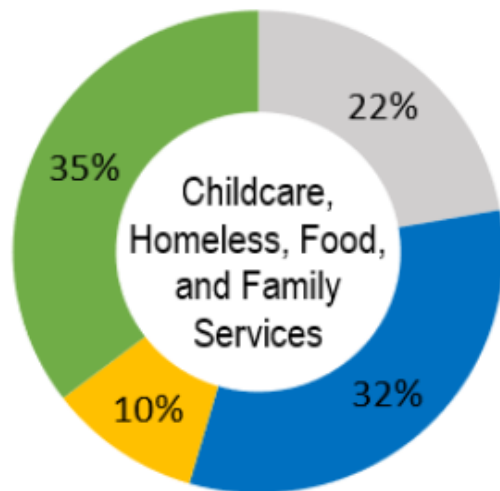
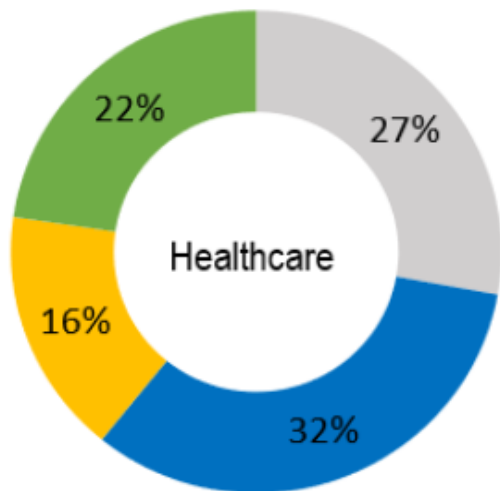
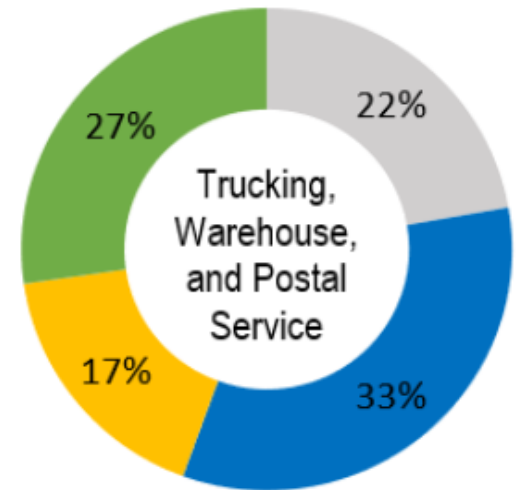
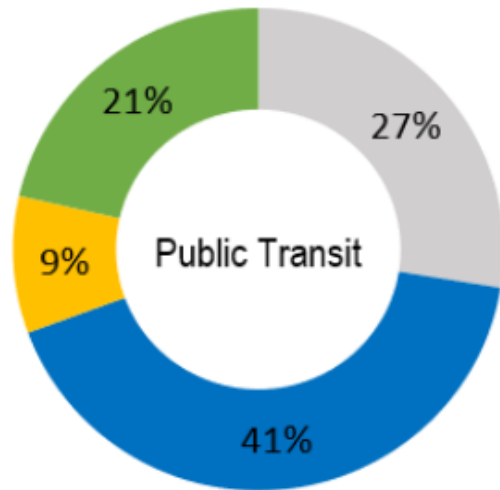
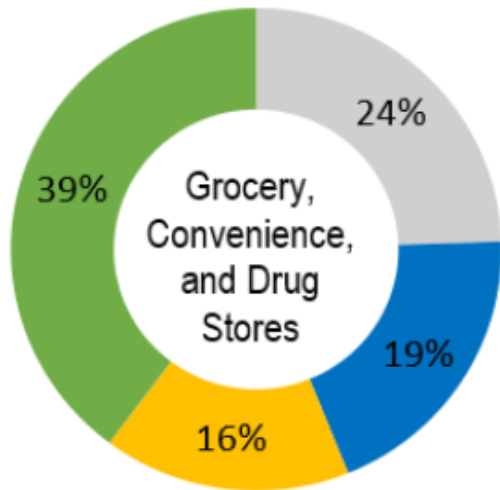
Source: NYT

## New York City Frontline Workers, by Sex

Industry	Women	All Employed	Share Women
Grocery, Convenience, and Drug Stores	60,732	144,700	42%
Public Transit	18,788	78,825	24%
Trucking, Warehouse, and Postal Service	10,381	48,019	22%
Healthcare	403,546	544,458	74%
Childcare, Homeless, Food, and Family Services	138,360	170,954	81%
Building Cleaning Services	27,375	51,823	53%
All Frontline Workers	659,182	1,038,779	63%

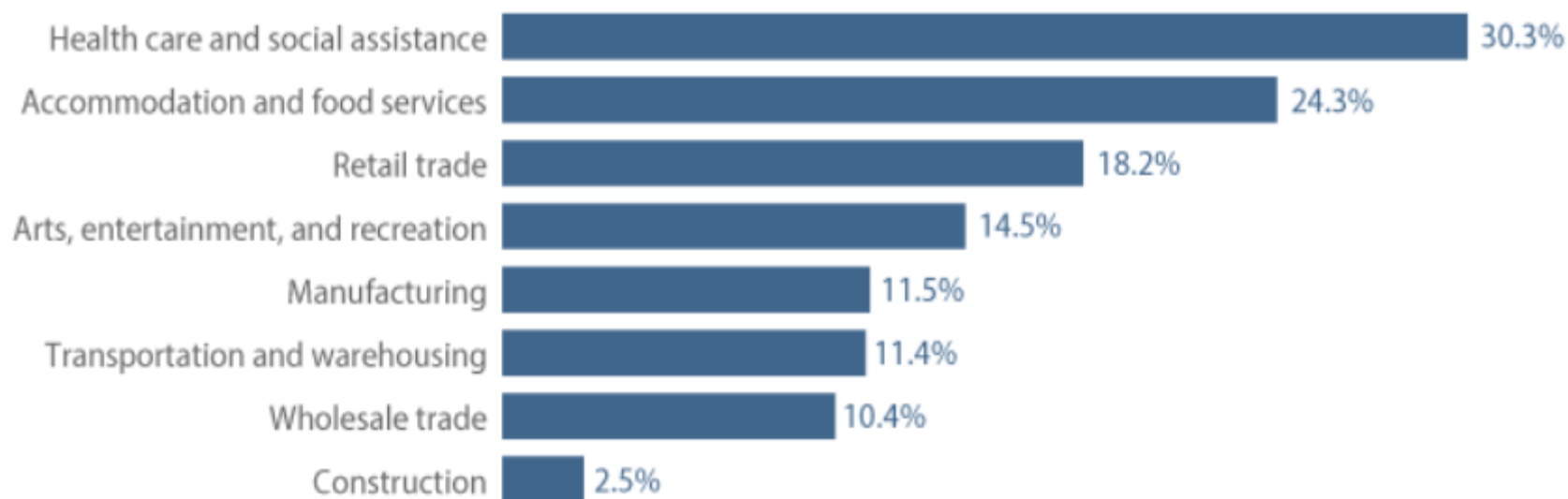
## New York City Frontline Workers, by Race and Ethnicity

■ White ■ Black ■ Asian ■ Hispanic



## Women of color are disproportionately represented in many industries most affected by recent unemployment claims

Share of workers in each industry most affected by initial unemployment claims who are women of color

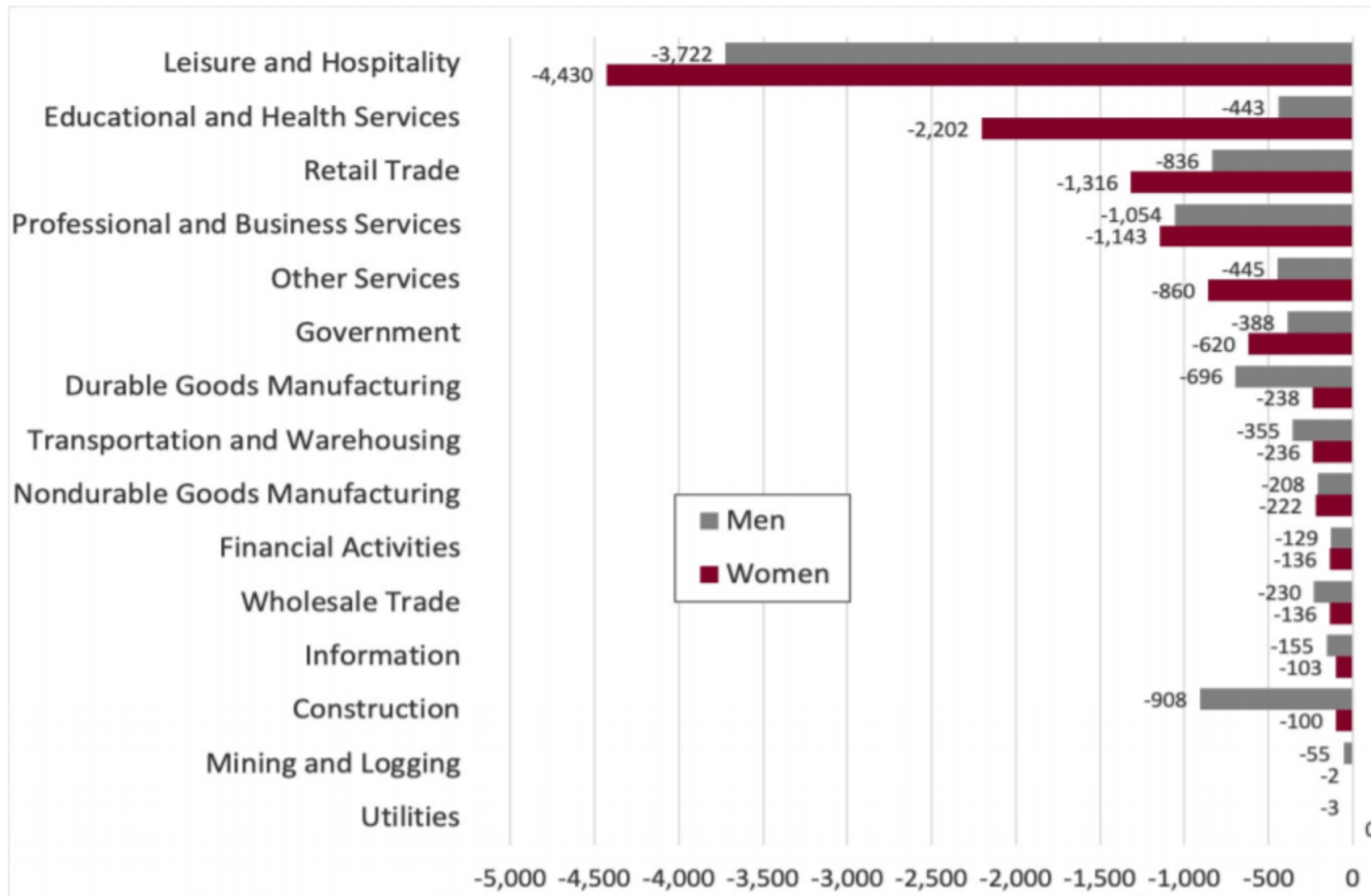




## Unemployment rate by race



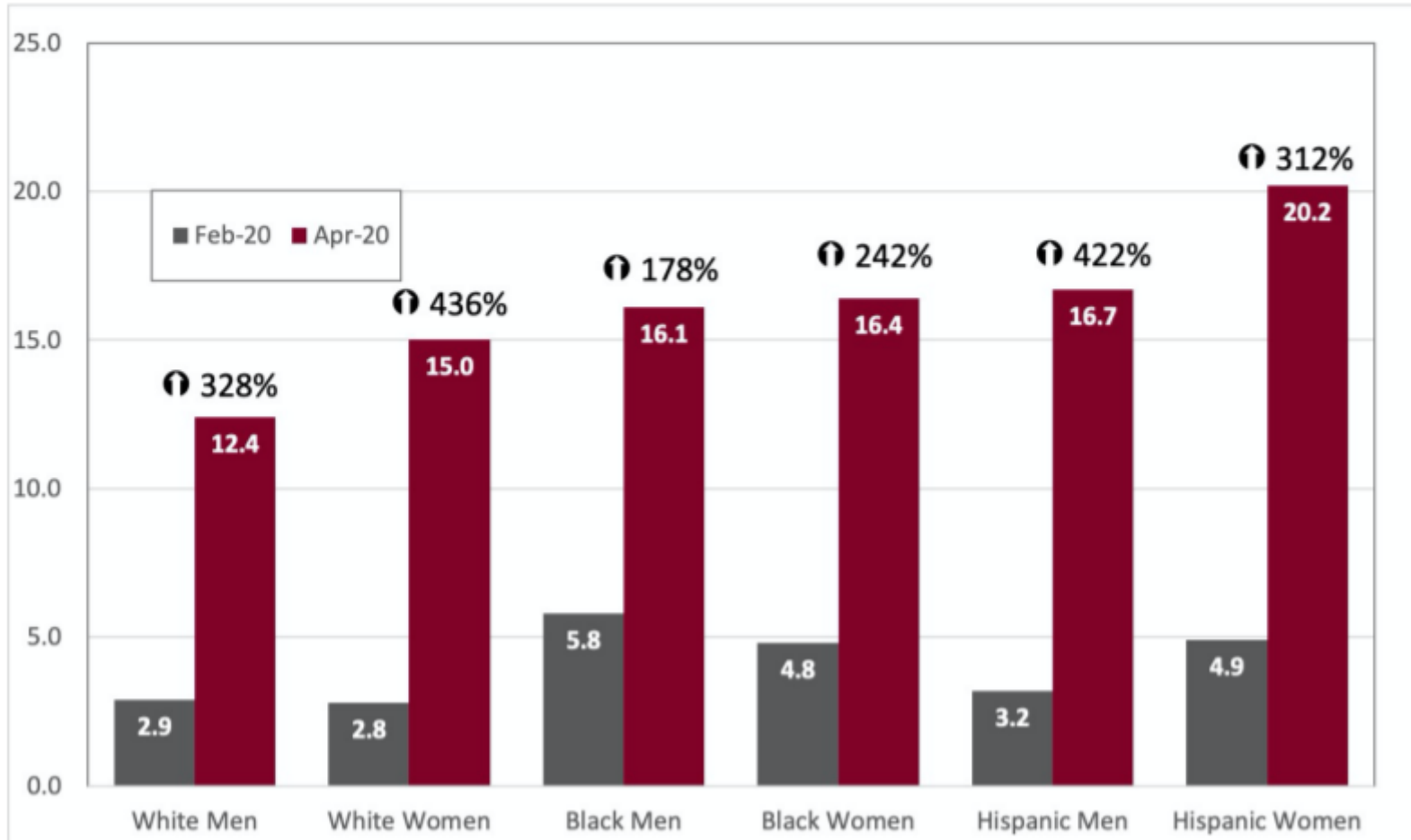
**Figure 1: Women and Men Experience Jobs Losses in All Major Sectors of the Economy**  
 Change in Number of Jobs on Payrolls, February-April 2020 (In Thousands)



Source: IWPR

## Figure 2: All Groups Saw Dramatic Increases in Unemployment since February- Rates of Unemployment are Particularly High for Hispanic Women

Unemployment Rates for Women and Men Ages 20 and Older, February and April 2020 and Change since February 2020 (Seasonally adjusted)

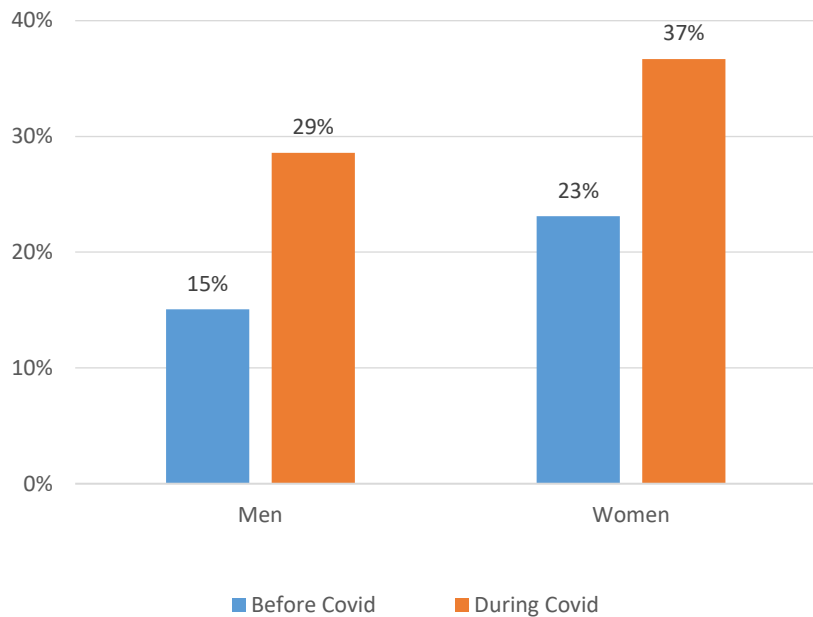


# Time Use and Unpaid Care Work at Home

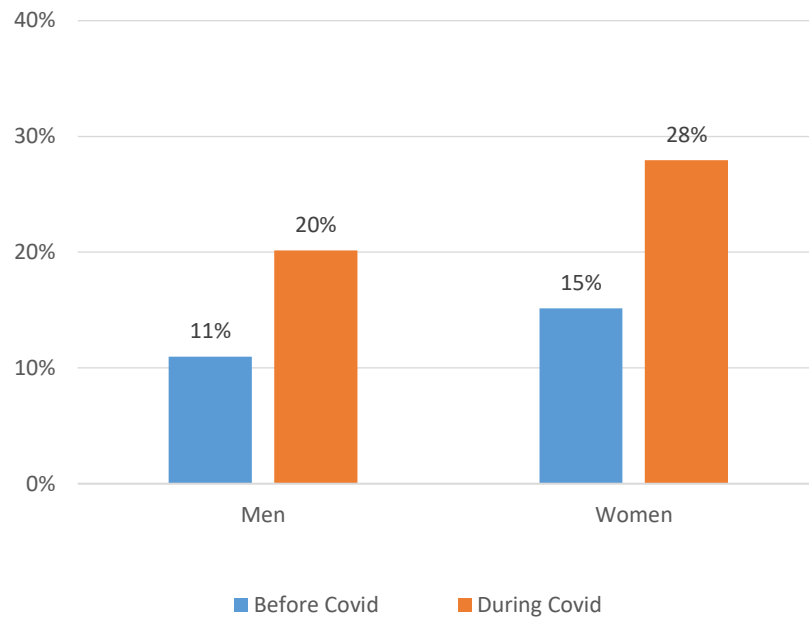
- Anecdotal evidence and survey evidence emerging that women doing disproportionately more unpaid care work at home
- Our own survey conducted by CWW and RBS
  - 1500 adults (1073 respondents living in households with opposite-gender partners)
  - Representative sample across the U.S.
  - Both men and women saw an increase in unpaid work providing active care for children and doing household chores; rose more for women
  - Surprising finding: men provide more care for elderly and disabled
  - Men stepping up contributed to greater work satisfaction and productivity for women

# Time Use and Unpaid Care Work at Home

≥ 5 Hrs Active Childcare/Day (Unpaid)

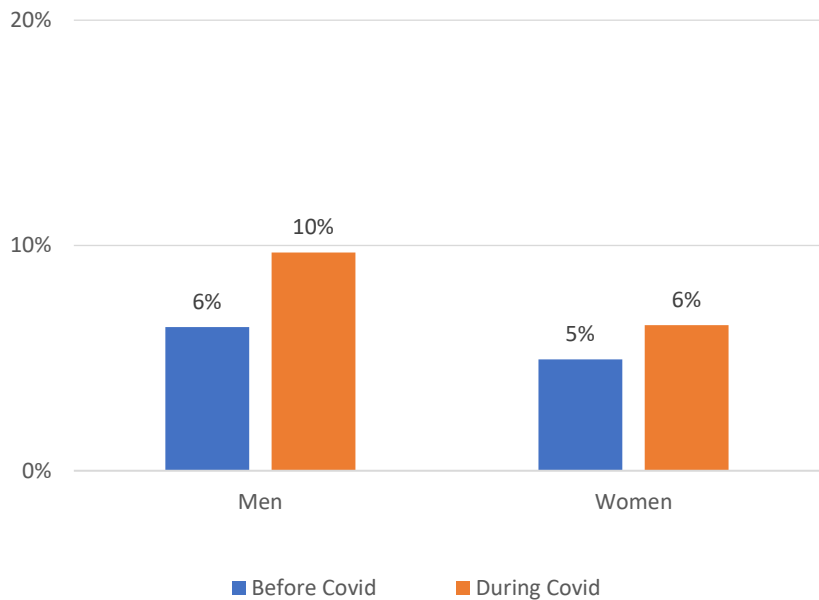


≥ 5 Hrs Housework/Day (Unpaid)

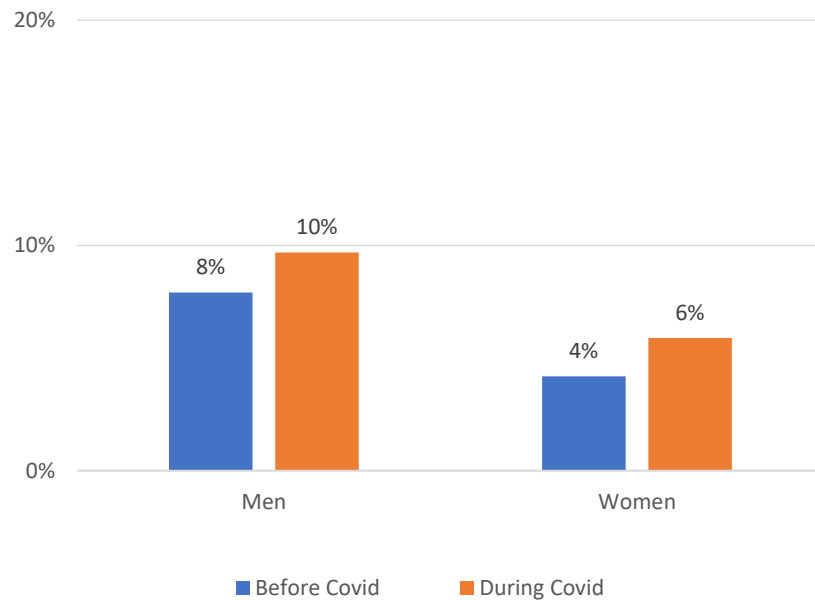


# Time Use and Unpaid Care Work at Home

≥ 5 Hrs Eldercare/Day (Unpaid)



≥ 5 Hrs Disabled Care/Day (Unpaid)



# Time Use and Unpaid Care Work at Home

- The silver lining: 30% of working parents reported an increase in productivity after the pandemic hit compared to 21% of people without children reported greater productivity
- Parents also reported higher job satisfaction after the pandemic hit compared to people without children (24% versus 13%)
- This increase partly due to the increase in men's contribution to unpaid labor in the home
  - Our analysis shows that men's contribution to caring labor is a positive determinant of women's work productivity and job satisfaction
  - This effect is particularly large for women of color

# Paid Care Workers During the Pandemic

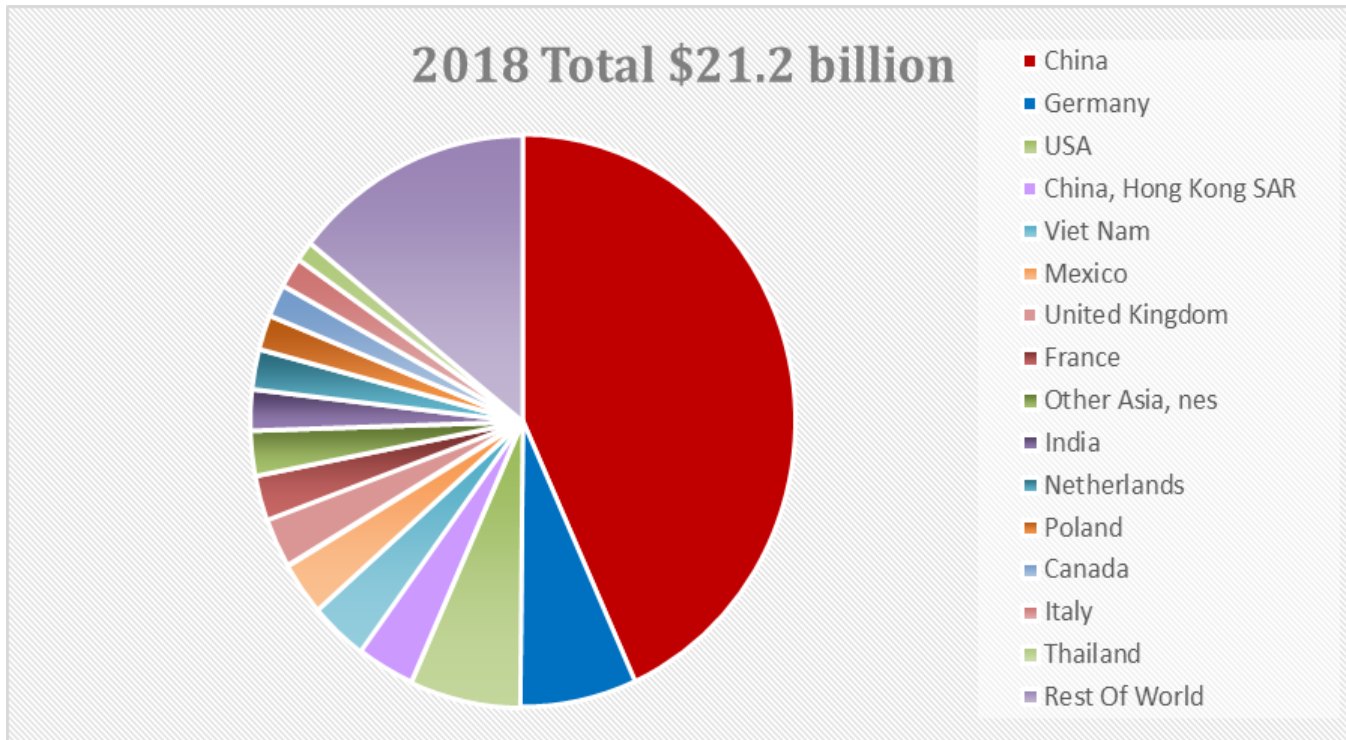
- US facing a dire shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) needed by health care workers fighting the coronavirus pandemic
- Nurses and doctors comparing themselves to firefighters putting out fires without water and soldiers going into combat with cardboard body armor
  - PPE shortages have dominated news cycle
- Endogeneity makes a PPE shortage a systemic public health problem, not just a worker's rights or occupational health issue
  - Sick healthcare workers increase demand for care and reduce quantity and quality of care



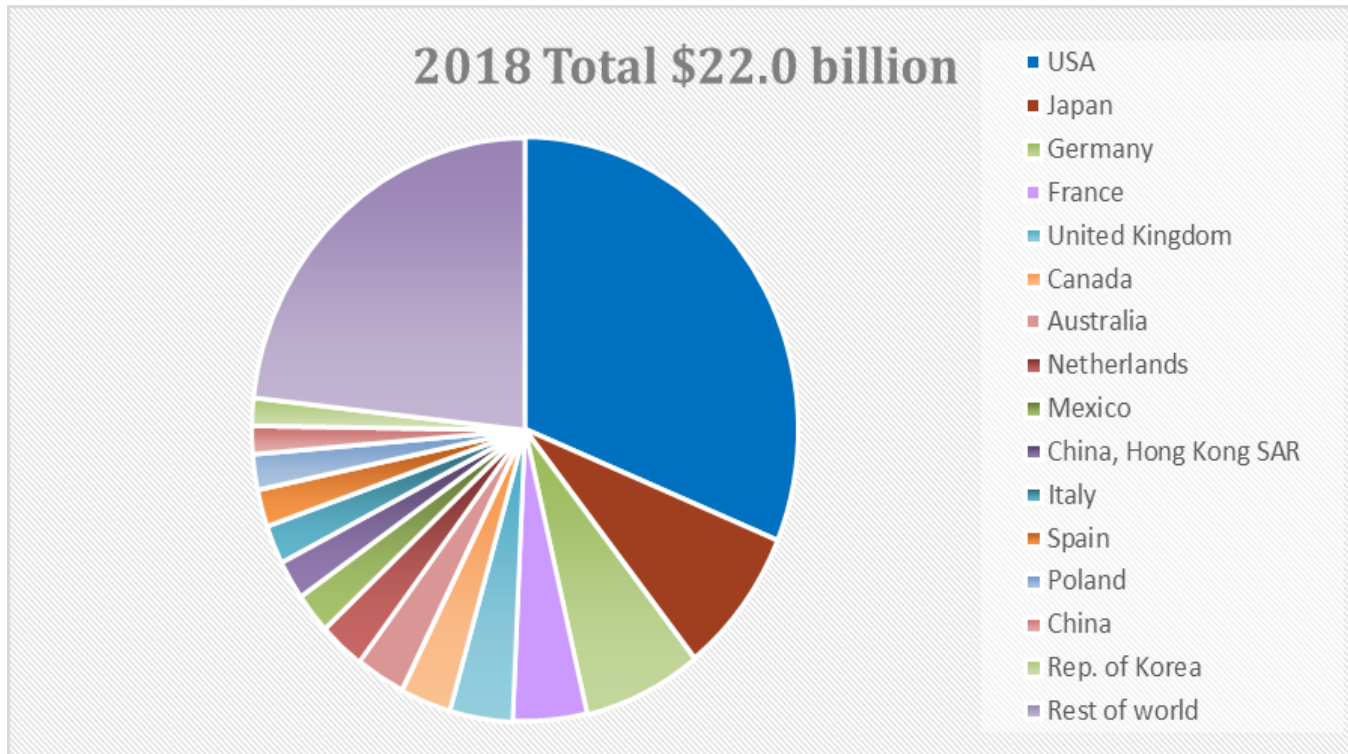
# Paid Care Workers During the Pandemic

- What are the causal factors behind the shortages?
- Main argument: problems from a structural issue were magnified by domestic and global shocks
  - The structural issue: dysfunctional costing model in hospital operating systems
  - Domestic shock: panicked marketplace behavior that depleted domestic PPE inventories
  - Global shock: severe disruptions to the PPE global supply chain
- Adding fuel to fire: lack of appropriate action by federal government
- A gender issue given the disproportionate representation of women among nurses, nursing assistants, and home health aides

# China is the world's largest exporter of masks and protective eye gear



# The US is the world's largest importer of masks and protective eye gear



# Gender-Aware Policy Responses

- Paid sick and family leave at federal and state level
- Other policies:
  - Boost unemployment insurance
  - Federal subsidies to small businesses
  - Support essential workers
    - PPE
    - Childcare
    - Stipends for emergency spending
  - Decrease the wealth gap
    - Invest in programs to increase home ownership
  - Enforce anti-discrimination legislation and other worker protections
    - Includes sexual harassment

# Gender-Aware Policy Responses

- Increase funding for domestic violence prevention and support initiatives
- Prioritize reproductive health care spending rather than deem it non-essential
- Provide wider access to employment and training programs
- Employers need to take the mask off work-life overlap and destigmatize family-friendly workplace policies

# Conclusion

- Covid-19 as a shock to social norms around unpaid care work
  - Optimism for more telecommuting and other family-friendly policies (job sharing and flextime)
  - More equitable distribution of work in the home
- Support for working families, low-income workers, and anti-discrimination measures
- Economic policy should be constructed within a broader, feminist framework of human wellbeing and justice rather than being solely concerned with output-based metrics such as economic growth