

The Struggle Is Real: Working Black Mothers, Childcare and COVID

PROVIDING FULL TIME CHILDCARE AND BEING
A COVID FULL-TIME WORK FROM HOME MOM IS UNSUSTAINABLE

In the November 23, 2020 edition of Essence magazine a sister related her day having survived another COVID pandemic workday. By now, frequent business partners know that we are a package deal as we can't take the health risks of enrolling our children in an in-person school or daycare. Virtual kindergarten while working, wiping up spills while working, tripping over toys while working, announcements of bathroom needs while I'm on the phone, praying I make it through..

Not only did I survive the workday, I know that my feelings of frustration about not being able to accomplish what I could prior to March 2020 is rooted in my inability to limit the amount of childcare related interruptions as I adore my kids, love being a mom, value quality time with my family, and feel blessed to have the privilege to work from home, and for myself. However, providing full time childcare and being a COVID full-time work from home mom is difficult. And although I survived the day, the wear and tear on my physical and mental health was real. And as a Black woman, I deserve more than trying to survive the workday while trying to survive the deadly health risks of the pandemic.

The lack of childcare to meet my family's needs feels very isolating, but in reality, it is a systemic issue that is creating a pandemic within a pandemic for working mothers, and as a Black woman trying to survive this pandemic, I know that I am not alone.

Black and Latina women are least likely to opt to drop out of the labor force as they are more likely to be the sole breadwinner in the families or to have partners working outside of the home during COVID. Compounding the issue further, Black mothers are twice as likely to be responsible for all of their family's childcare and housework during COVID compared to white women. Even in a global pandemic that threatens

our lives and that of our loved ones disproportionately, we still have to be superhuman.

The Center for American Progress reports that Black and Latina women have seen the largest drop in their employment-to-population ratios since February and jobs for Black women are returning 1.5 times slower than their white counterparts.

With only 52% of Black women saying they have enough income to support their basic needs during COVID, compared to 71% of white women, how can parents working during the pandemic or re-entering the workforce after unemployment afford the extraordinary cost of childcare with the average cost of daycare being over \$9,000 a year?

Many parents, particularly low-income parents, report they will not be able to return to the pre-pandemic childcare arrangements compared to middle or high income parents. This hardship will likely disproportionately impact low-income parents of color, forcing them to leave their children in less safe or unstable childcare settings.

Many Black women led households without the safety nets to leave the workforce even temporarily to provide childcare and homeschool as compared to some of their white counterparts.

The economic impact of the pandemic is being felt disproportionately by Black women and women of color. With half of Black households being headed by single women, and 38% of these households living below the poverty line, thus making stable childcare less accessible, Black women across socioeconomic status are experiencing extraordinary levels of stress as they shoulder the weight of the pandemic with inadequate childcare, increasing risks of poor maternal health outcomes for Black women of childbearing age.