

How disparities for women and minorities widened during the pandemic

BY [CHARLOTTE SCHUBERT](#) on September 26, 2021 at 11:30 am

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Stephan Blanford (left) and Celestina Barbosa-Leiker. (Photos via Children's Alliance and WSU)

The pandemic [has hastened](#) already-existing economic trends, such as the increase in remote work. But at the same time, it is also exacerbating existing economic disparities.

Speakers at [a recent meeting](#) hosted by the Washington State Academy of Sciences examined how the pandemic is affecting women and increasing racial and socio-economic inequities in Washington state and elsewhere.

The widening of disparities during the pandemic is a global phenomenon, as highlighted in a [new report](#) from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that assessed the disproportionate effects on women.

Psychologist [Celestina Barbosa-Leiker](#), a vice chancellor for research and an associate professor at Washington State University Health Sciences Spokane, said

women in the U.S. have less secure employment, overall lower wages and as a group have higher caregiving burdens than men. In addition, the majority of single-parent households are led by women.

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"A lot of research nationally has already shown that most of that caregiving burden was put on the mom or the working mom," Barbosa-Leikers said, noting that working parents had to figure out how to juggle their work with kids' remote schooling.

Barbosa-Leiker pointed to [a survey](#) suggesting that scientists with children took a big hit in productivity, with women scientists most at risk. A [separate study](#) suggested that scientific publications by women researchers, compared to their male counterparts, were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

As the economy recovers, men are being hired back faster than women; [less than 12% of job gains in August went to women](#). Unemployment among Black women and Latinas has been particularly high.

Women's participation in the workforce also [dropped to a 33-year low](#) in January, with 2.3 million exiting since the pandemic, compared with 1.8 million men.

Barbosa-Leiker highlighted her [recent study](#) on the stresses faced by 162 pregnant women and new mothers during the pandemic last year. She and her colleagues found that women of color and women with lower incomes reported less social and financial support than women with higher incomes and non-hispanic white women.

In April 2020, nearly half of childcare centers in Washington [said they were at risk of closing](#), and many of them did, said Stephan Blanford, executive director of the Children's Alliance. His group helped lobby for new childcare measures in the state legislature.

Now, most of the state's new capital gains tax [will go to early learning and childcare](#), about \$415 million from 2021 to 2023.

Other racial disparities noted at the meeting included higher pandemic-related unemployment for African American people in the Puget Sound region and ongoing disparities in home ownership.

There are also regional disparities in the state, with more than 15% of people [accessing basic food services](#) in some counties in southwest and eastern Washington, compared to 8% in King County. "Northeast Washington had yet to

even recover from the last recession when we started to enter the pandemic,” said [Lisa Brown](#), director of the Washington state department of commerce.

All of the economic numbers are overlaid on pronounced higher health burdens of COVID-19 in many minority communities. The cumulative COVID-19 death rate for Hispanic people, for instance, is [more than three times](#) that of white people in the state, and vaccine uptake is lower.

While almost 76% of people in the state age 12 and above have received at least one vaccine shot, uptake varies widely in an environment of vaccine hesitancy and distrust.

“The problem we have is that in certain communities you have 80-to-90% uptake and others are at 30-to-40%,” said [Umair Shah](#), the state’s secretary of health. [Disparities in vaccine uptake](#) occur between ethnic and racial groups and across geographic regions. Added Shah: “That’s the biggest challenge that we have.”

Blanford encouraged meeting participants to “think really deeply about how you can engage with the communities that have been deeply impacted by the virus and by the twin virus of racism.”

GeekWire also covered other topics at the meeting in the following stories:

- [Economists describe how the pandemic magnifies trends such as remote work and movement patterns](#)
- [Misinformation and vaccines: How public health messaging and experts can help curb distrust](#)



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