

# Women Carried the Burden of Unpaid Caregiving in 2020

MAY 2021

**More than 65 million women** provide unpaid care in the form of child care, family care and eldercare during 2020. A majority of these women did so while holding full- or part-time jobs.<sup>1</sup> More than half (nearly 35 million) of these women are also mothers of children under the age of 18. Seventy-two percent of these mothers are also in the labor force.<sup>2</sup> Women's caregiving has historically been undervalued in the United States, but this year, the pandemic has underscored the value of the caregiving work that often falls to mothers and the critical need for paid family and medical leave and other policies to support caregivers.

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**\$416.3 BILLION**  
**THE VALUE OF UNPAID CAREGIVING IF MOTHERS WERE PAID THE MINIMUM WAGE**

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**The majority of mothers providing unpaid care are also in the labor force.**

- **Mothers' jobs and mental health suffered without adequate support for family caregiving during the pandemic.** Six months into the pandemic, nearly 6 in 10 women said that handling child care responsibilities during the pandemic had become somewhat or very difficult.<sup>3</sup> More mothers than fathers felt like they couldn't give their all at work, needed to limit work hours, or turned down promotions or important projects, because they have children.<sup>4</sup> Mothers who are also essential workers or key breadwinners for the 15 million families who rely on women's wages<sup>5</sup> – disproportionately women of color – have contended with the stress of providing care for their families while also working long hours and facing higher risk of contracting COVID-19.<sup>6</sup>

**The unpaid care crisis that existed for mothers before the pandemic has gotten worse.**

- **The demands of childcare have increased significantly during the pandemic – and mothers have born the majority of that burden.** All parents have needed to do more caregiving on average during the pandemic, but mothers have done so even more than fathers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that U.S. women's unpaid childcare hours have increased to an

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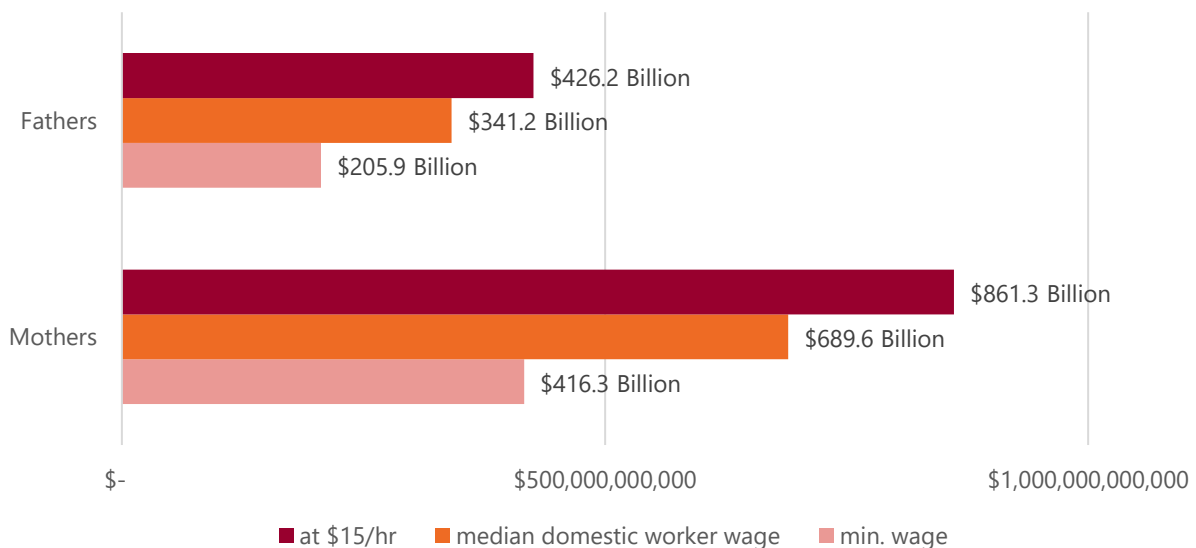
**\$689.6 BILLION**  
**THE VALUE OF UNPAID CAREGIVING IF MOTHERS WERE PAID THE MEDIAN WAGE FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS**

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average 31.65 hours per week.<sup>7</sup> This is nearly eight more hours per week than men on average.<sup>8</sup> Altogether, mothers in the U.S. spent more than 57 million hours on unpaid child caregiving in 2020.<sup>9</sup>

- **Pandemic caregiving has pushed mothers out of the labor force – and recovery has been slow.** In April 2020, labor force participation for mothers of young children dropped by 3.4 percentage points, compared to 2.9 percentage points for fathers. But while fathers had recovered most of their lost ground by the end of the year, mothers’ labor force participation was still 2.2 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels.<sup>10</sup>

### Value of Unpaid Care in 2020



U.S. Census Bureau. (2020, December). *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement: Table A.3 Parents With Coresident Children Under 18, by Living Arrangement, Sex, and Selected Characteristics* and OECD (2021) *Social Protection and Well-Being Index: Time Spent in Unpaid Work*. Calculated by multiplying the number of mothers in the United States by the 31.65 hours per week during the pandemic that mothers are spending on unpaid child caregiving and the number of fathers by the 19.34 hours per week during the pandemic that fathers are spending on unpaid child caregiving. These hours were then multiplied by the current federal minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour), the median wage for a domestic worker,<sup>11</sup> and the \$15 per hour minimum wage proposed in the Raise the Wage Act.

**Paid family and medical leave would support mothers and other working parents who are providing care to children and other loved ones.** Mothers – and all unpaid caregivers – need and deserve policy solutions that support the work that they do to care for our nation’s families. Policymakers need to prioritize care in pandemic recovery legislation and build out the United States’ care infrastructure. Valuing mothers’ caregiving would allow mothers to provide care for their families without fear of lost wages or benefits, while also giving parents – especially mothers of color – time to take care of their own health needs.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving. (2020, May). *Caregiving in the U.S. 2020 Report*. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/05/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00103.001.pdf>

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U.S. Census Bureau. (2020, December). *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement: Table A.3 Parents With Coresident Children Under 18, by Living Arrangement, Sex, and Selected Characteristics*. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html>. Figure calculated by adding the Census Bureau estimate of mothers of children under the age of 18 and the AARP/NAC estimate for the number of female caregivers.

2 U.S. Census Bureau. (2020, December). *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement: Table A.3 Parents With Coresident Children Under 18, by Living Arrangement, Sex, and Selected Characteristics*. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html>.

3 Pew Research Center. (2021, January). *A rising share of working parents in the U.S. say it's been difficult to handle child care during the pandemic*. Survey conducted October 13-19, 2020. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/26/a-rising-share-of-working-parents-in-the-u-s-say-its-been-difficult-to-handle-child-care-during-the-pandemic/>

4 Ibid.

5 Mason, C.N., Shaw, E., Lacarte, V., and Jauregui, E., Institute for Women's Policy Research (2020, May) *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19*. Retrieved 6 May 2021 from <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf>

6 National Partnership for Women and Families. (2021, March). *Called to Care: A Racially Just Recovery Demands Paid Family and Medical Leave*. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/reports/called-to-care-a-racially-just-demands-paid-family-and-medical-leave.html>

7 OECD. (2021). *Social Protection and Well-Being Index: Time Spent in Unpaid Work*. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757#>. Converted from minutes per week into hours per week.

8 Ibid.

9 U.S. Census Bureau. (2020, December). *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement: Table A.3 Parents With Coresident Children Under 18, by Living Arrangement, Sex, and Selected Characteristics*. Retrieved 25 April 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html>. OECD (2021) Social Protection and Well-Being Index: Time Spent in Unpaid Work. Retrieved 26 April 2021 from <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757#>. Converted from minutes per week into hours per week. Calculated by multiplying the number of mothers in the United States by the 31.65 hours per week during the pandemic that mothers are spending on unpaid child caregiving.

10 Boesch, T., Grunewald, R., Nunn, R., & Palmer, V. (2021, February). *Pandemic pushes mothers of young children out of the labor force*. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Publication. Retrieved 4 May 2021, from <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2021/pandemic-pushes-mothers-of-young-children-out-of-the-labor-force>

11 Economic Policy Institute (2020, May) *Domestic workers chartbook: A comprehensive look at the demographics, wages, benefits, and poverty rates of the professionals who care for our family members and clean our homes*. Retrieved 26 April 2021 from <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/>

12 See note 5.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](https://NationalPartnership.org).

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