



December 2020

KENTUCKY LABOR FORCE UPDATE

Gender Employment Disparities During the Coronavirus Pandemic

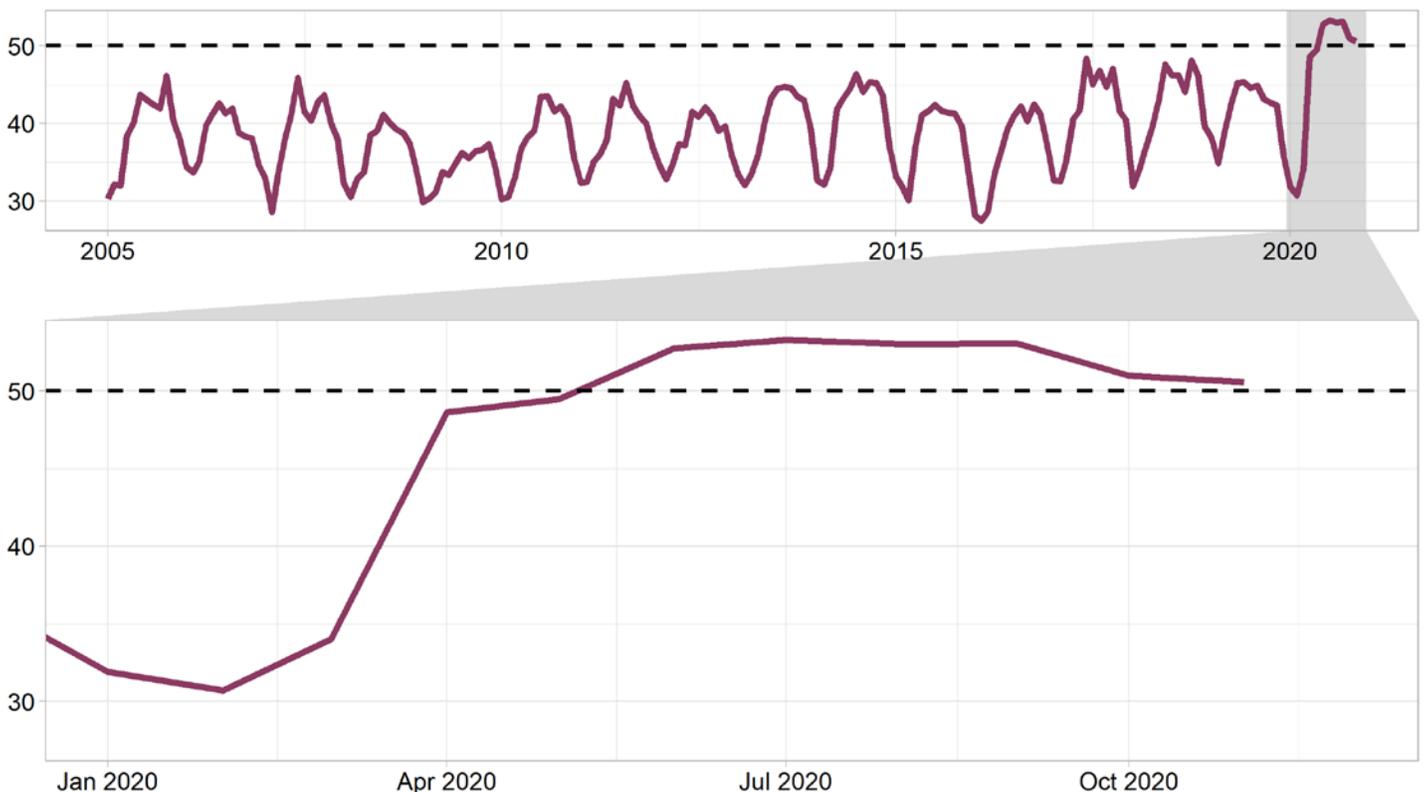
In the [September Monthly Labor Review](#), released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), economist Eleni Karageorge writes that the “current economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately hurting women’s employment,” citing the uneven gender composition of industries most affected by the pandemic, as well as the increased need for at-home childcare as contributing factors. The following analysis will characterize the extent to which these factors may be affecting women’s employment in Kentucky.

According to the U.S. [Employment and Training Administration](#), the number of traditional Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants reporting their sex as female peaked at 97,813 in the week of May 31st 2020. A month later, in the week of June 30th, female claimants began to comprise the majority of all claimants in Kentucky, and have continued to do so through the the week of November 30th.

In June 2020, women began comprising the majority of insured unemployment claimants in Kentucky for the first time in over two decades.

This trend is nearly unprecedented. Through all time periods for which data are available, the percentage of total claimants that reported as female has only exceeded that of their male counterparts twice, briefly in two individual weeks in the summer of 1998. In contrast to the current recession, the highest percentage of total claimants reporting as female during the Great Recession was 41% in July 2008 (when there were 15,210 such active claims).

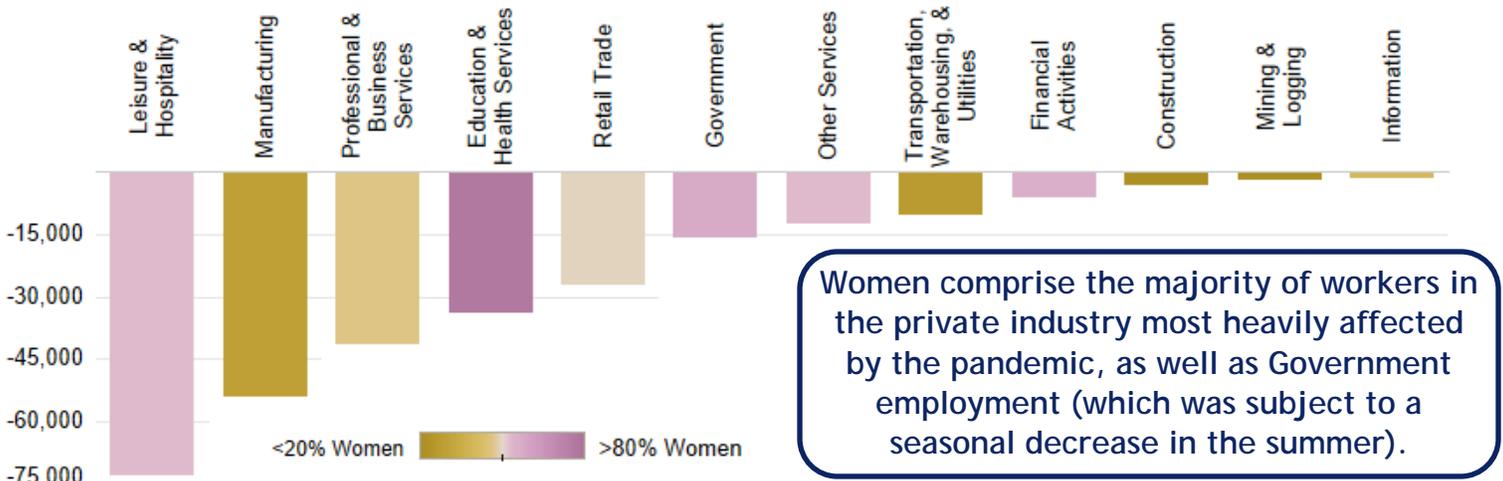
*Percentage of the Insured Unemployed Reporting their Sex as **Female***





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March to April 2020 Employment Loss* by Kentucky Industry (Shaded by National Gender Composition of Industry)

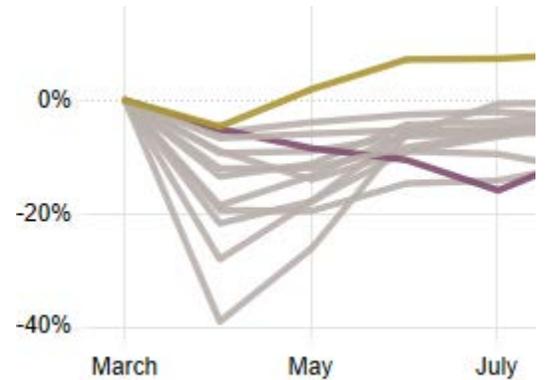


Source (both adjacent graphs): U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (CES)
*Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

The distinct effects of the current pandemic-related recession on women in the workforce may partially be explained by the gender composition of heavily impacted industries. National [BLS estimates](#) indicate that female workers comprise 53% of jobs in the Leisure and Hospitality industry, which shed the largest volume of jobs in Kentucky from March to April 2020 (73,100). In contrast, some large male-dominated industries were relatively insulated from effects of the pandemic. Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities, for example, accounted for 113,600 jobs in March and shed less than 10% of those jobs in the following month.

The seasonality of industry employment may also have limited opportunities for women workers in the midst of the pandemic. For example, Construction (87% male according to national estimates), was the only major industry in Kentucky to exhibit any job gains relative to March employment levels in Kentucky by July 2020. Meanwhile, Government employment (58% female) was unique in that it reached its lowest point of the year in July 2020.

Cumulative Percent Employment Change since March 2020 by Industry, (Government and Construction Highlighted for Seasonality)



Female parents experience the longest stints on unemployment, and non-retired women cite childcare as their most common reason for not working.

There is also evidence that suggests women's employment status is tied to the demands of childcare. Using data from KYSTATS' longitudinal data system to identify likely parents, estimates indicate that, for unemployment claims filed after March 15th 2020 and active until September 30th 2020, female parents

Average Duration* of Unemployment Insurance Payment Period by Demographic Group (in Weeks)



*Analysis is limited to regular covered claims, and does not include [CARES Act provisions](#) or [other types of benefits](#).

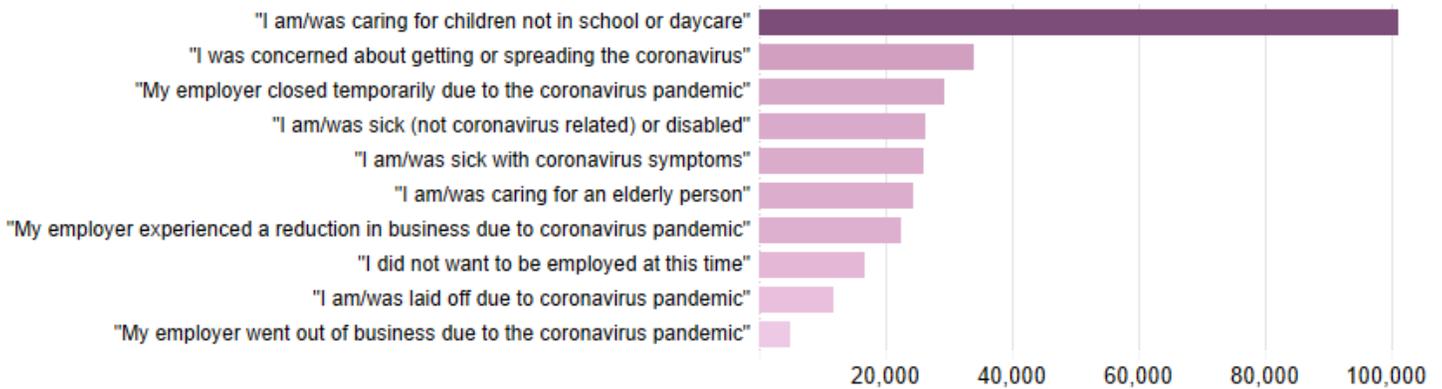


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experienced the longest stints of unemployment assistance on average (13.1 weeks). Conversely, male parents' average length of unemployment assistance was nearly two weeks shorter (11.3 weeks).¹

If parenthood seems to have some effect on the situations of women who are unemployed (a designation which indicates that an individual is seeking employment), then can the same be said of women who are not currently seeking employment (i.e. women not currently in the labor force)? State-level data on this topic are scarce, but the U.S. Census Bureau has begun publishing results from the [Household Pulse Survey](#) as an experimental data series that seeks to "measure household experiences during the coronavirus pandemic." Data from the most recent² Household Pulse Survey Public Use File indicate that the estimated number of non-retired women in Kentucky that are not working because they are "caring for children not in school or daycare" exceeds 100,000- more than the combined number of women not working for any employer-related reason.

Estimated Number of (Non-Retired) Women Not Working by Provided Reason



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey (Experimental), October 28th - November 9th 2020 Public Use File

Summary

Women are experiencing record unemployment in Kentucky, in terms of both volume of workers and the percentage of overall unemployment claimants for which they account. Prior to the pandemic, they accounted for the majority of jobs in the most negatively affected industry, and are largely underrepresented in insulated industries and industries with mid-year seasonal increases. Finally, female parents experience the longest stints on unemployment assistance, and women cite childcare as a reason for not working more often than for employer-related reasons.

¹Analysis is limited to regular covered claims, and does not include [CARES Act provisions](#) or [other types of benefits](#).

²As of the time this article was written, the most recent Public Use File reflects October 28th - November 9th 2020.

Kentucky Labor Force Update

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Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS)
Jessica Cunningham, Ph.D., Executive Director
Ashley Jones, Labor Market Information Branch Manager

Kentucky Center for Statistics
500 Mero Street, 5th Floor SC
Frankfort, KY 40601
KYSTATS.KY.GOV

For requests and inquiries, contact
Kimberly Gester • KGester@ky.gov • 502.782.3066

Contributors to *Kentucky Labor Force Update* this month:
Sam Keathley, Barrett Ross, Kris Stevens

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