Even before the pandemic, mothers with less than a college education faced profound barriers to building economic security.

In 2019, women who started but did not finish high school and women with only high school diplomas were paid 72 cents and 75 cents, respectively, for every dollar paid to their male counterparts. This financial precariousness makes it more difficult for non-college-educated women to afford reliable, quality child care. Among working families with children under age five who pay for child care, families in which the mother had less than a high school education spent 17 percent of their income on child care, compared to 9 percent for those in which the mother had a bachelor’s degree.

COVID-19 has only exacerbated these disparities. Workers without a college degree continue to experience high rates of unemployment, even as the overall unemployment rate has dropped. And there are lingering job shortages among child care workers, many of whom lack a college degree, including nearly half of center-based and two-thirds of home-based child care workers. These non-college-educated child care workers earned particularly low wages even prior to the pandemic.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Building a system of high-quality, affordable child care for all will help non-college-educated women and their families today and over the course of their lifetimes.

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The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the challenges that non-college-educated women and their families face in the United States. Investing in high-quality, affordable child care would not only support these families, their communities, and child care workers in real-time, but also build economic security for these families throughout their lives.