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Women and Work in West Virginia, Two Years Into the Pandemic

Summary Findings for the West Virginia Oversample in NWLC's National February Survey

To: Interested Parties

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West Virginians have faced a volatile work landscape during the pandemic with many losing, quitting, changing, and finding jobs—but the impact has not been uniform. West Virginian women face unique and higher barriers than men in both reentering the workforce and thriving in the workplace. Women in the state are more likely than men to say they are worse off now than two years ago, in both financial and mental health. At the same time, West Virginia women are more likely to say they took on additional child care and caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic, making it harder for them to get work done or look for new work. The survey also highlights structural challenges that many women face beyond the public health and economic crisis caused by the pandemic, especially with low pay, lack of work flexibility, and benefits. The difficult impacts of the pandemic help explain why policies that address the barriers facing working and unemployed women are so popular—and even more so among women.

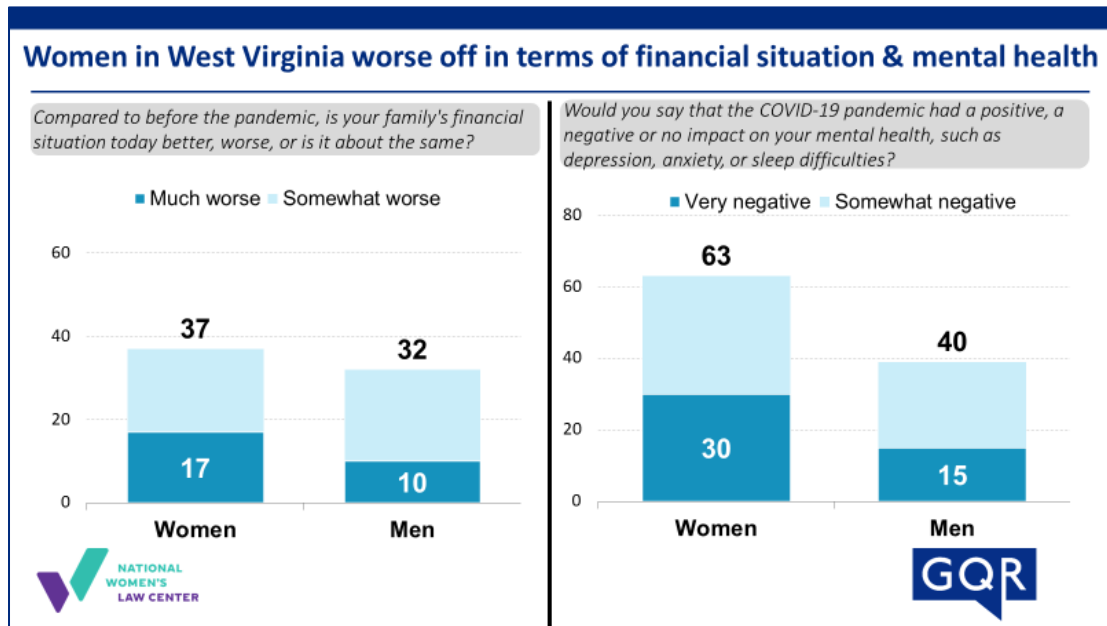
The following summary details key findings from the West Virginia oversample of the recent national poll of 3800 adults in the United States, conducted via web and live telephone interviewing from February 7-25, 2022. Nationally, half of all interviews were conducted online, while 29 percent were conducted by cell and 21 percent were conducted by landline. The West Virginia findings are based on a representative oversample of 311 adults. Margin of error on a probability sample of this size for the state is +/- 5.6%. Margin of error is higher among subgroups; due to sample size constraints, the state-level data cannot be disaggregated by race/ethnicity in combination with gender. The data are statistically weighted to ensure the full sample's regional, age, race, and gender composition reflects that of the estimated general population of adults in the U.S. In June 2022, income weights by race were also applied, leading to small data adjustments from the prior version.

Negative effects on mental health and financial security

Women in West Virginia are less likely than men to say they are better off than just two years ago. At the same time women feel worse off financially and bear more responsibilities at home, they feel their mental health is worsening.

- Only 13 percent of West Virginia women report being better off financially today than at the onset of the pandemic, while almost three times as many (37 percent) report being worse off. Among men in the state, 27 percent say they are better off and 32 percent say they are worse off.
- A large majority of women in West Virginia report they are experiencing worse mental health now than when the pandemic began. More than 6 in 10 women (63 percent) say the pandemic

had a negative impact on their mental health, such as depression, anxiety, or sleep difficulties; comparatively, 40 percent of men say their mental health is worse.



- Among West Virginia women who report a negative mental health impact, 29 percent say they pursued treatment from a mental health professional, such as therapy or medication, for mental health issues, compared to 22 percent of men. Among those women who did not pursue help, more than 1 in 3 (37 percent) say treatment or professional help was not affordable, too hard to access, or that they did not have time to pursue it.
- Among women in West Virginia, 53 percent say their own or their family’s physical and mental health is one of the top two causes of stress for them, while 49 percent of men say so. Just under half (48 percent) of women cite bills and expenses as a top stressor, compared to 32 percent of men.
- Caregiving concerns are also a notable source of stress, especially for women: 34 percent of West Virginia women cite caring for children, elderly family members, or balancing work and caregiving as a stressor, compared to 27 percent of West Virginian men who cite one of these causes.

A volatile employment landscape – both women & men struggling to get back to work

The pandemic brought dramatic changes to the American workforce, with large numbers of workers losing or quitting jobs, changing hours, and changing jobs. Almost 3 in 10 West Virginians (29 percent) say they lost or quit a job, reduced hours, or changed jobs in the two years since the pandemic began. However, unlike the national landscape, West Virginia women are about equally as likely as men to have lost or quit jobs during the pandemic, while roughly half of women and men who lost or quit jobs have not yet returned to work.

- In West Virginia, 18 percent of women working in February 2020 (and 20 percent of men) say they lost or quit a job during the pandemic, compared to 29 percent of working women

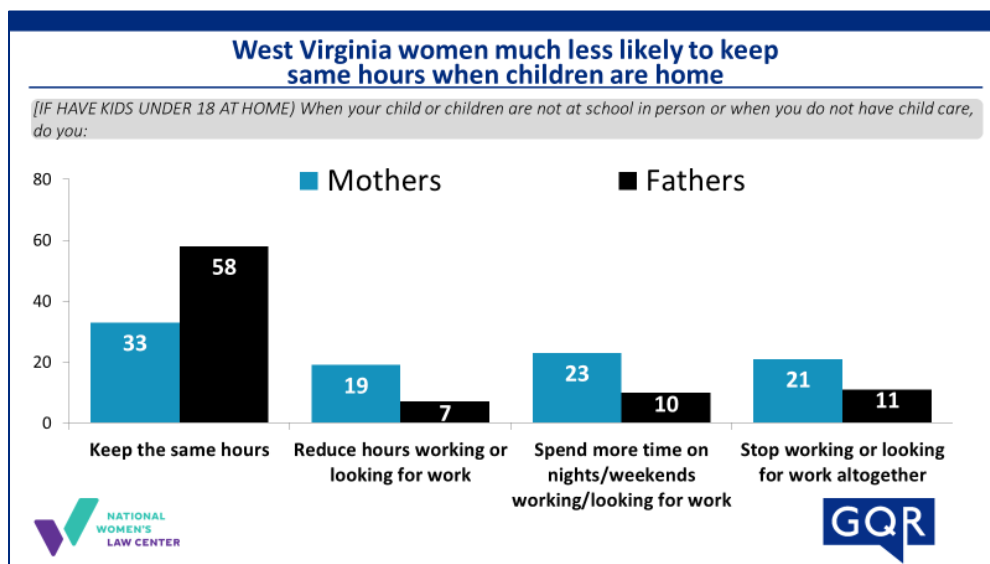
nationally. Working women in West Virginia are about as likely as men to say they lost hours (30 percent and 29 percent, respectively).

- Both women and men in West Virginia are struggling to get back to work after losing or quitting jobs during the pandemic: Only 52 percent of West Virginia women, and 44 percent of men, say they found a new job after losing or quitting a job. This is different from the national landscape, where men are much more likely to have returned to work than women; the difference is not a result of more women getting back to work, but instead is driven by fewer men in West Virginia going back to work.
- When it comes to what West Virginians are looking for in a new job, both women and men are most likely to say their top priority is salary and benefits. After that, women are most likely to prioritize control over their work hours and the ability to work from home, while men are more likely to name growth opportunities and good coworkers and managers.
- Looking forward, both women and men see good job opportunities available, but women are slightly less optimistic than men—a 68 percent majority of women in West Virginia say there are good job opportunities available for someone like them, while 74 percent of men say so.

Low job quality and inadequate support to meet caregiving needs

Women in West Virginia are significantly more likely to say increased responsibilities are hindering their ability to work, as child care and other caregiving responsibilities are falling more heavily on women. And working women in West Virginia are particularly likely to lack the flexibility, wages, and benefits they need to care for themselves and their families.

- Women are much more likely to say that having children at home from school or child care affects their ability to get work done or look for work. Just 33 percent of West Virginia mothers maintain the same hours when kids are home, much less than the share of fathers (58 percent) who say so. Mothers in the state are more likely than men to say having kids at home means they must reduce working hours, work more nights and weekends, or stop working altogether.



- More than 1 in 5 (23 percent) West Virginia women say they have caregiving responsibilities for loved ones who are ill, disabled or elderly; similarly, 20 percent of men in the state report having these caregiving responsibilities.
- Fewer than half (46 percent) of all West Virginia workers have paid sick days through their jobs, and just over one-third have paid medical leave (36 percent) or paid family leave (34 percent).
- Among West Virginia workers, 47 percent of women report being in jobs paying \$15/hour or less, compared to 26 percent of men in the state. Among those women who are not married or living with a partner, 77 percent receive \$15/hour or less. Workers in these low-paid jobs are especially likely to lack access to paid family or medical leave, paid sick days, or other benefits (such as health insurance or retirement benefits) through their jobs.

Getting West Virginia women back to, and thriving at, work requires real support

We tested a set of policies designed to address the challenges women are facing that surfaced in the survey, including measures to improve workplace conditions, support caregiving, and improve access to health care without cost barriers. A majority of women support all 12 of the policies tested. Most men in the state support each of the initiatives, with the exception of protecting access to reproductive health care, including abortion, and ensuring access to the expanded Child Tax Credit. Statewide, more than 80 percent support funding for home care services for seniors and those with disabilities; paid family and medical leave; and access to high-quality, affordable child care. Although all these initiatives are popular statewide, women are 31 points more likely than men to support requiring two weeks' notice for work schedule changes, 18 points more likely to support higher wages for tipped workers, and 19 points more likely to support free pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Percent of West Virginians who support initiative	Women	Men
Increase funding for home- and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities	89	85
Provide all workers with paid family & medical leave	88	77
Grant right to request work schedule change and 2 weeks' notice of work schedules for workers w/variable hours	84	53
Fund free pre-K for ages 3-4	81	62
Ensure access to high-quality, affordable child care	79	79
Increase wages for tipped workers	78	60
Provide access to comprehensive health care, w/no cost-sharing	69	68
Protect employees' right to discuss salaries	62	74
Raise minimum wage to \$15 per hour, then increase w/median wages	59	57
Protect access to reproductive health care, including abortion	59	42
Require employers to report pay data to improve enforcement of anti-discrimination laws	57	55
Ensure families can access expanded Child Tax Credit	53	46