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LAW CENTER**

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RESILIENT BUT NOT RECOVERED

LGBTQ WOMEN AND NONBINARY

PEOPLE IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Author

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Introduction

Compounding a long history of discrimination, sexism, racism, and exclusion, the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic hit lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and otherwise queer (LGBTQ) people, including nonbinary folks, particularly hard. LGBTQ people experience greater harassment and discrimination in the workplace¹ and greater financial insecurity compared to non-LGBTQ people.² LGBTQ people of color often experience even greater discrimination and harassment.³ As a result, many LGBTQ people were facing economic insecurity long before the pandemic began—and many are still experiencing the negative effects of the pandemic today, despite the ongoing recovery. The pandemic's economic fallout not only affects LGBTQ people's financial security but also impacts their mental and physical health, with the potential for long-term repercussions.

In 2022, the National Women's Law Center partnered with polling firm GQR to hear from people across the country about how they have been faring in the pandemic. This analysis captures key findings from that research, focusing on the experiences of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people, which includes women

who identify as lesbian or bisexual, transgender women, and people who identify as nonbinary. It highlights how two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected their jobs, their finances, their health, and their lives—and details the investments and supports that LGBTQ women and nonbinary people need to thrive.

About the Data

Unless otherwise noted, data in this fact sheet is from a February 2022 poll conducted by polling firm GQR and the National Women's Law Center (the "NWLC polling"). The poll includes a nationally representative base sample of 1,000 adults in the United States, in addition to oversamples of Black women, Latinas, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI women), women who left the workforce at some point during the pandemic, women in low-paid jobs making \$15/hour or less, and state oversamples in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and West Virginia.⁴

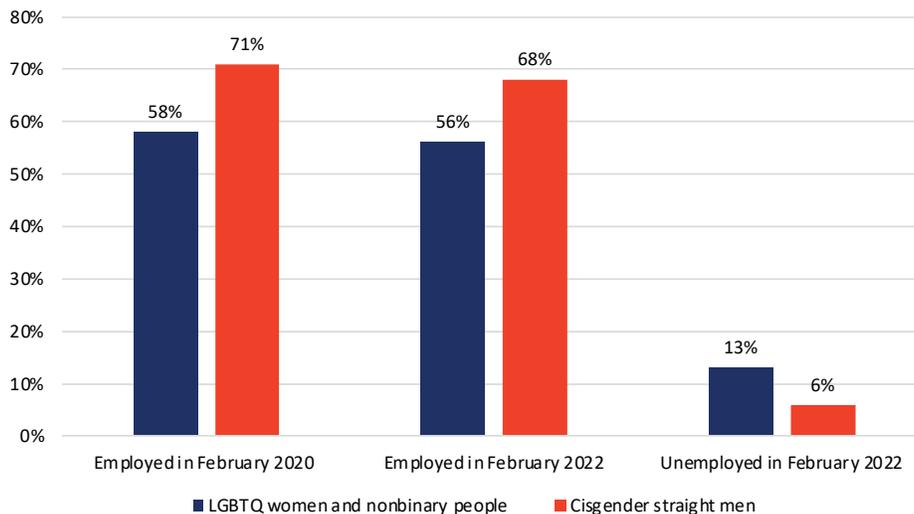
LGBTQ women and nonbinary people in this survey

Many LGBTQ women and nonbinary people surveyed are young: 84% are under 50 years of age and nearly half (45%) are under 30 years old. About 50% of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people are people of color, including Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Native American, Latinx, and others who are not white, non-Hispanic. One in three LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (28%) have a college degree compared to 34% of cisgender straight men.⁵ Over half of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (51%) have children age 18 and under living in their home and more than one in three (34%) are caregivers for ill, disabled, or elderly family members.⁶

COVID-19 harmed the economic security of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people.

LGBTQ women and nonbinary people surveyed experienced lower employment and greater unemployment before and during the pandemic relative to cisgender straight men. Slightly fewer than six in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (58%) report that they were employed⁷ in February 2020 as well as in February 2022 (56%), compared to 71% of cisgender straight men who were employed in February 2020 and 68% employed in February 2022. Over one in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (13%) surveyed were unemployed and looking for work in February 2022, compared to only 6% of cisgender straight men.

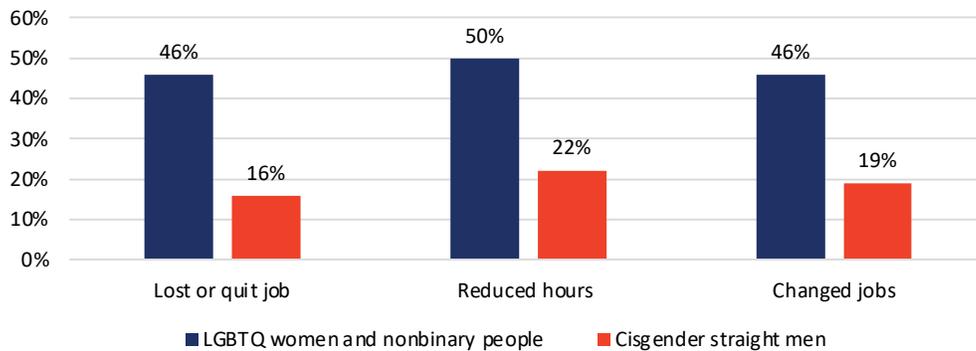
Share Employed in Feb. 2020/Feb. 2022 and Unemployed in Feb. 2022, by Selected Demographics



Nearly half of LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers (46% of those employed in February 2020) report that they lost or quit their jobs during the pandemic—nearly three times the share of cisgender straight men (16%) who lost or quit their jobs. LGBTQ women and nonbinary people were also far more likely to lose employment income during the pandemic due to reduced work hours: Half of LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers (50% of those employed in February 2020) report that they or their employer reduced their hours during the pandemic, compared to 22% of cisgender straight men. LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers are also nearly 2.5 times more likely than cisgender straight men to have changed jobs: 46% of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people who were employed in February 2020 report that they changed jobs during the first two years of the pandemic, compared to 19% of cisgender straight men.

The volatility that many LGBTQ women and nonbinary people have experienced in their employment and work hours in the past two years has undermined their economic security, with many reporting negative financial impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly four in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (39%) report that their financial situation is worse now than before the pandemic,⁸ compared to only 22% of cisgender straight men. More LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (43%) than cisgender straight men (35%) name bills and expenses as one of their two biggest stressors, while nearly half of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people of color (49%) report the same. Close to three in four LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (73%) live in households with annual income under \$75,000 and are almost twice as likely as cisgender straight men (37%) to live in these households. And nearly one in five LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (17%) report that they have delayed their retirement as a result of the pandemic.

Pandemic Employment Changes for LGBTQ Women/Nonbinary People and Cisgender Straight Men Employed in Feb. 2020



The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the mental health of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people.

The uncertainty and widespread disruptions—to our economy, our health, our routines, and our lives—produced by the pandemic have led many people to feel anxious or depressed.⁹ Financial insecurity can exacerbate anxiety and depression,¹⁰ and as LGBTQ women and nonbinary people have experienced greater economic insecurity, they also have experienced worse mental health. More than three in five LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (63%) report the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health,¹¹ compared to over two in five cisgender straight men (43%) who report the same. And health concerns are nearly on par with financial concerns as a source of stress: Close to four in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (39%) report their mental or physical health as one of their two biggest stressors, while only 26% of cisgender straight men report the same.

Of those who report a negative impact on their mental health, half of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (50%) sought treatment; among cisgender straight men who report a negative mental health impact, 73% say they sought treatment. LGBTQ women and nonbinary people cited a number of reasons for not seeking mental health treatment, including not being able to afford it, not having the time or energy, having a hard time finding a provider, or feeling that they could handle it on their own and did not need treatment. Having health insurance coverage can increase access to mental health treatment, but over one in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (13%) report not having any health insurance coverage.

More than three in five LGBTQ women and nonbinary people report that the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health.

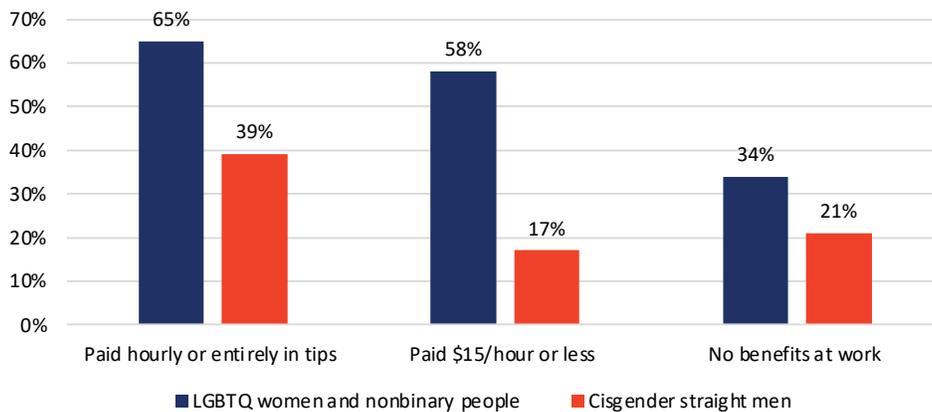
LGBTQ women and nonbinary people often face low wages and minimal benefits at work—and many are looking for better jobs.

LGBTQ women and nonbinary people often hold low-quality jobs that pay too little to cover basic necessities, lack benefits like health insurance, and have unpredictable work schedules.

- Nearly seven in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers¹² (65%) are paid hourly, including those relying on tips for some or all of their income. LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers are more likely than cisgender straight men (39%) to be paid hourly or in tips.

- LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers are also 3.5 times more likely than cisgender straight men to work in low-paid jobs: 58% of LGBTQ women are paid \$15 or less an hour, compared to 17% of cisgender straight men.
- Two in five LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers (40%) know their work schedules three weeks or less in advance, compared to 22% of cisgender straight men.
- Nearly half of LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers (47%) do not have health insurance benefits at their current or more recent job, compared to only one in three cisgender straight men (37%). In fact, more than one in three LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers (34%) report they have no key benefits at all—i.e., no health insurance, retirement benefits, paid sick days, paid family or medical leave, or paid vacation time—through their jobs, compared to only 21% of cisgender straight men.

Select Employment and Compensation Features, LGBTQ Women/Nonbinary People and Cisgender Straight Men



In the NWLC polling, nearly four in 10 LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (39%) say they are planning to change jobs or find new employment within the next six months—far more than the share of cisgender straight men (17%) who report the same. And many are fairly optimistic about their prospects: nearly three in five LGBTQ women and nonbinary people (59%) somewhat or strongly agree that there are good job opportunities available for them. As they look to their next job, LGBTQ women and nonbinary people are prioritizing salary and benefits, with 44% citing these as one of the two most important features to them in a job. Roughly one in four LGBTQ women and nonbinary people identify the ability to work from home (28%), control over their hours (25%), and opportunities for career growth (23%) as top priorities.

LGBTQ women and nonbinary people are more than twice as likely as cisgender straight men to have lost or quit their jobs, experienced reduced work hours, or changed jobs during the pandemic.

LGBTQ women and nonbinary workers are more than three times more likely than cisgender straight men to work in jobs that pay \$15/hour or less.

Moving toward a full recovery for LGBTQ women and nonbinary people

For many LGBTQ women and nonbinary people, the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened economic insecurity and exacerbated economic disparities relative to cisgender straight men. While the American Rescue Plan Act and other federal relief measures enacted in 2020 and 2021 helped families make ends meet and created conditions for job growth, LGBTQ women and nonbinary people need further and intentional policy interventions

to experience an equitable and sustainable recovery and to prevent a return to pre-pandemic employment and economic conditions. Policies that boost families' incomes, improve employment conditions and wages, support caregiving, and expand access to affordable health care—including reproductive health care—have extremely strong support from LGBTQ women and nonbinary people.

Policy	Share of LGBTQ women and nonbinary people support
Increase funding to make home- and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities more widely available and improve job quality for home care workers	90%
Provide all workers with paid family and medical leave to take time to care for a child, recover from a serious health condition, or care for a family member with a serious health condition	87%
Ensure families can access high-quality, affordable child care , making sure no family pays more than 7% of their income for child care and early educators are paid a living wage	82%
Fund free pre-kindergarten for all children ages 3 and 4	82%
Protect the right and ability to access reproductive health care , including abortion	81%
Require employers to report pay data by gender, race, and ethnicity to the agency that enforces workplace discrimination laws, so the agency can identify pay discrimination	80%
Grant employees the right to request a work schedule change without fear of retaliation, and require employers to provide at least two weeks' notice of work schedules for workers in jobs with variable hours	79%
Increase the wage that employers are required to pay tipped workers , so that tipped workers are entitled to the same minimum wage as anyone else, before tips	78%
Gradually raise the national minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$15 per hour, then automatically increase it to keep pace with rising wages	78%
Provide access to comprehensive health care with no cost-sharing	75%
Protect employees' right to discuss salaries with colleagues , so employees can find out if they are being paid unfairly compared to their coworkers	75%
Ensure all families can access the full child tax credit and continue payments that gave families up to \$300 per child monthly	74%

- 1 Brad Sears, Christy Mallory, Andrew R. Flores, and Kerith J. Conron, "LGBT People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment" (Williams Institute, September 2021), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-workplace-discrimination/>.
- 2 M.V. Lee Badgett, Soon Kyu Choi, and Bianca D.M. Wilson, "LGBT Poverty in the United States" (Williams Institute, October 2019), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-poverty-us/>.
- 3 See Brad Sears, Christy Mallory, Andrew R. Flores, and Kerith J. Conron. "LGBT People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment."
- 4 Margin of error on a probability sample of this size for the national base is lower than +/-3 percent. Margins of error for the oversampled groups range from +/-3.3 percent for women who left the workforce to +/-6.1 percent for AAPI women. Margin of error is higher among subgroups. GQR survey data were weighted by age, race, and census region to reflect the U.S. population, as well as weighted to income by race.
- 5 "Cisgender straight men" includes men who identify as straight or heterosexual, and who do not identify as transgender or non-binary.
- 6 Caregivers include those that were full-time, part-time, or occasional caregivers.
- 7 Employment includes full-time and part-time workers.
- 8 Includes those who reported that their finances were somewhat or much worse than before the pandemic.
- 9 "COVID-19 Pandemic Triggers 25% Increase in Prevalence of Anxiety and Depression Worldwide," World Health Organization, March 2, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>.
- 10 Wilson, Jenna M., Jerin Lee, Holly N. Fitzgerald, Benjamin Oosterhoff, Baris Sevi, and Natalie J. Shook, "Job Insecurity and Financial Concern During the COVID-19 Pandemic Are Associated With Worse Mental Health." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 62, no. 9 (September 2020): 686–91, <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000001962>.
- 11 Negative impact includes those who report the COVID-19 pandemic had a somewhat or very negative impact.
- 12 Workers include those who worked full-time or part-time in 2020 or 2022.



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