



SPOTLIGHT REPORT

An Intersectional Look at Pandemic Impacts

THIS IS A SECTION OF A LARGER REPORT. READ THE FULL REPORT AT [WOMENOUTOFWORK.CA](https://womenoutofwork.ca)





"Being an occasional worker we have no paid sick days. I would like paid sick days so we do not have to force ourselves to work if we are sick."

- a racialized respondent

We know that women have borne more than their share of pandemic job losses and other negative work impacts; however, it's important to note that these impacts have *not* been distributed equally among all women.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), younger women, women with disabilities, and lower-paid workers have been impacted far more than their white, middle-and-higher-income counterparts. For the purposes of our reporting, we grouped people who identified as Black, racialized and/or Indigenous into one group (BIPOC) to increase the sample size for analysis. Where possible, we have also included statistics for Indigenous respondents only, however it should be noted that at 51 respondents (a small sample size) results should be interpreted with caution. We have also included statistics on respondents with disabilities, and newcomers to Canada.⁹

⁹ The survey did not ask respondents if they were members of the Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities in Hamilton. We have included research from other sources on Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workforce in the literature review for this project. We recognize that this is a community that experiences barriers in the labour force and we hope that more research becomes available about the needs and challenges of these communities for pandemic recovery.

In terms of demographics from our January 2021 survey, we found that:

- 83% of respondents identified as white, 3% identified as Indigenous and 14% identified as racialized. In total there were 249 respondents who identified as Black, Indigenous, and/or racialized.
- 12% of all respondents moved to Canada more than 5 years ago, 4% moved to Canada within the last 5 years and 84% indicated that they are not newcomers to Canada. Out of the group that moved to Canada within the last 5 years (newcomers), 69% identified as racialized.
- 15% of respondents noted that they have an invisible disability, 1.5% noted that they have a visible disability, and less than 1% of respondents said they had both. 84% noted that they do not have a disability.
- Within the Black, Indigenous and other racialized women grouping:
 - 51 respondents identified as Indigenous
 - 50 identified as Arab, West Asian and/or Middle Eastern
 - 37 identified as Black
 - 35 identified as Latin American
 - 29 identified as South Asian
 - 18 identified as South East Asian
 - 14 identified as Chinese
 - 10 identified as Filipino¹⁰

WORK SITUATION PRE-PANDEMIC

Close to 70% of BIPOC respondents were employed before the onset of the pandemic. Compared to all respondents (10% unemployed), 19% of BIPOC respondents were unemployed in February 2020. For white respondents, 7% were unemployed prior to the pandemic. Ten percent of BIPOC respondents were self-employed.

20% of respondents with disabilities reported being unemployed before the pandemic. For newcomer women who moved to Canada within the last five years, 26% were unemployed. Close to one-quarter of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 were unemployed before the pandemic (24%).

When asked to describe their primary job prior to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 67% of BIPOC respondents said they worked full-time, (compared to 75% of white respondents). 65% of respondents with disabilities reported that they worked full-time.
- 29% of BIPOC respondents and 39% of respondents with disabilities reported that they had access to benefits.
- 24% of BIPOC respondents and 32% of respondents with disabilities said they had access to paid sick time.

When asked about pre-pandemic income, 70% of BIPOC respondents said they earned less than \$50,000 annually, with 30% making \$50,000 or more. By contrast, 52% of white respondents made less than \$50,000/year, and 48% made \$50,000 or more per year. 67% of respondents with disabilities made less than \$50,000/year and 32% made \$50,000 or more.

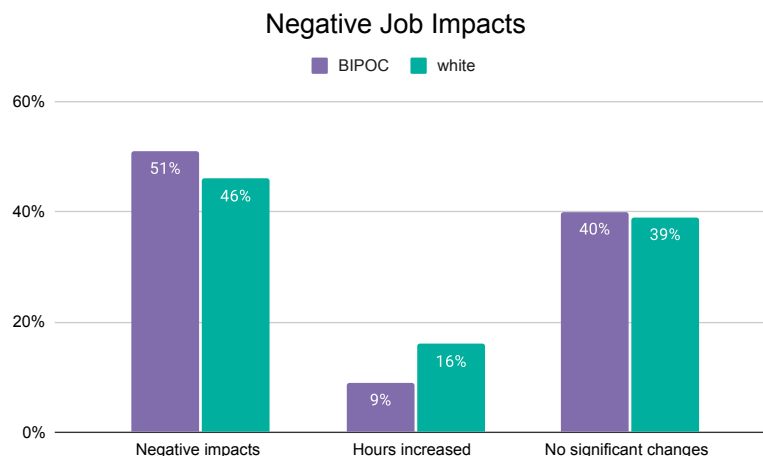
¹⁰ Groups with less than 10 respondents are not reported here for confidentiality reasons.



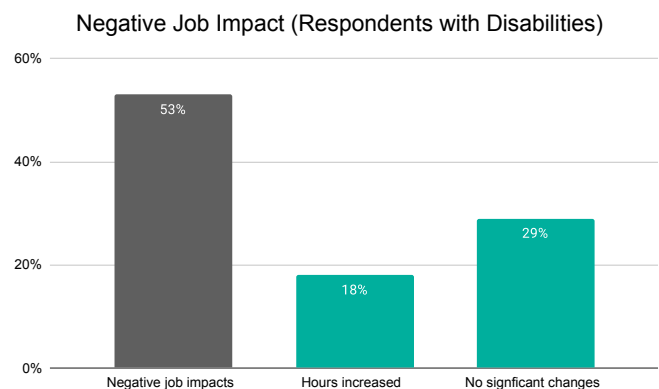
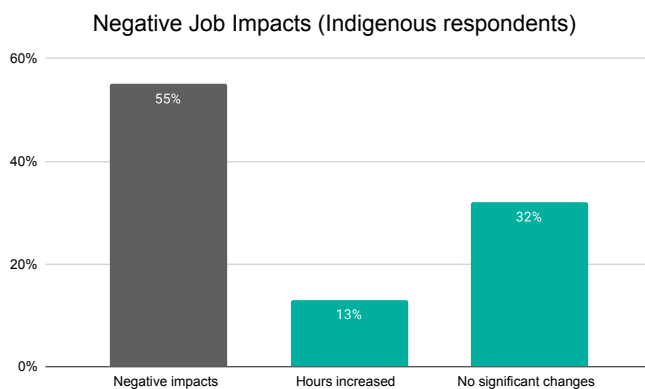
“The conditions at work were not following Ontario guidelines. I chose to leave for my family’s safety.”

PANDEMIC JOB IMPACTS

For BIPOC respondents, 51% reported negative job impacts due to the pandemic, e.g., they had left their job, been laid off at some point (either temporarily or permanently), or had their hours reduced. For white respondents, 46% indicated that they had experienced negative job impacts.



“I am extremely tired and fear that if I do become ill I will be discriminated against based on my disability status.”



For Indigenous women who responded to the survey, 55% experienced negative job impacts.

For respondents with disabilities, 53% reported negative job impacts.

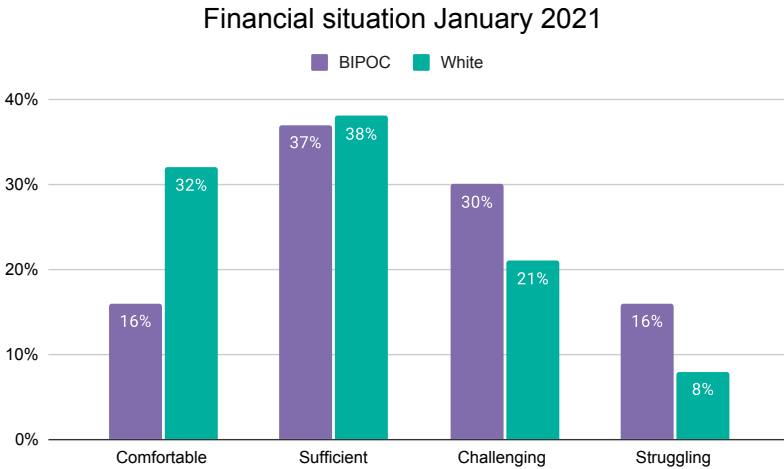
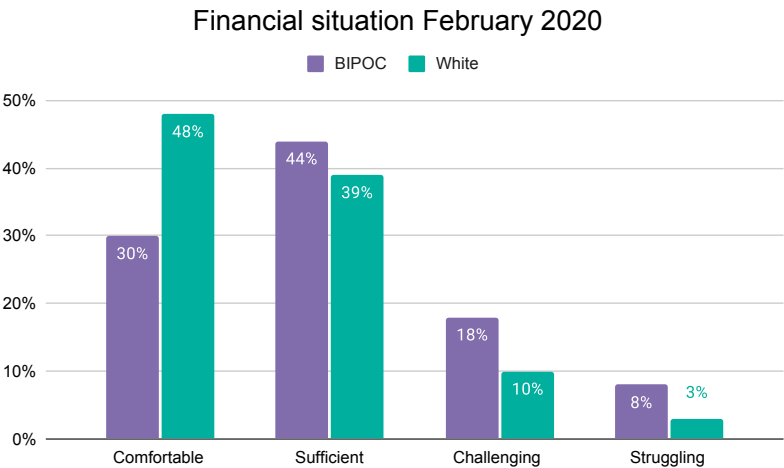
For both white and BIPOC respondents, around 40% said there were no significant changes to their primary job. Nine percent of BIPOC respondents reported that their work hours increased, whereas 16% of white respondents said the same. For respondents with disabilities, only 29% said there were no significant changes to their primary job.

When asked “Did COVID-19 result in you working your primary job from home?” similar proportions of BIPOC respondents (38%) and white respondents (35%) noted that their job does not allow them to work from home. 40% of respondents with disabilities were unable to do their job from home.

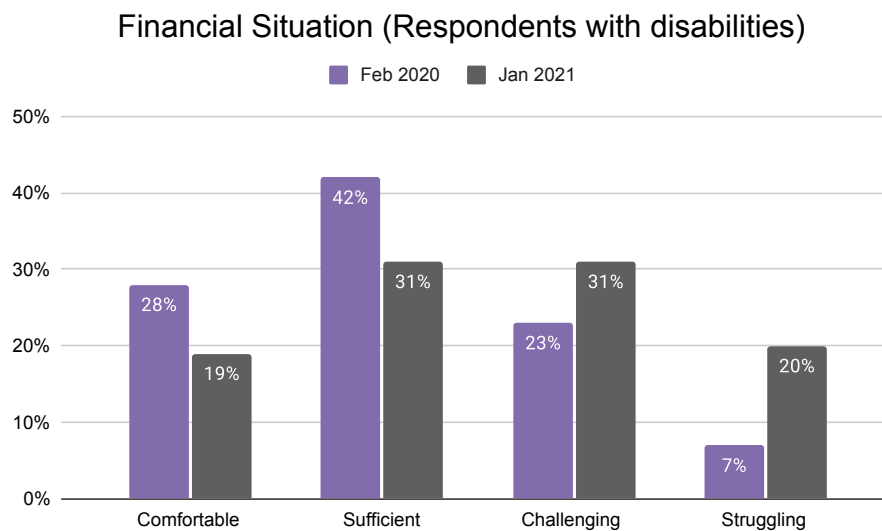
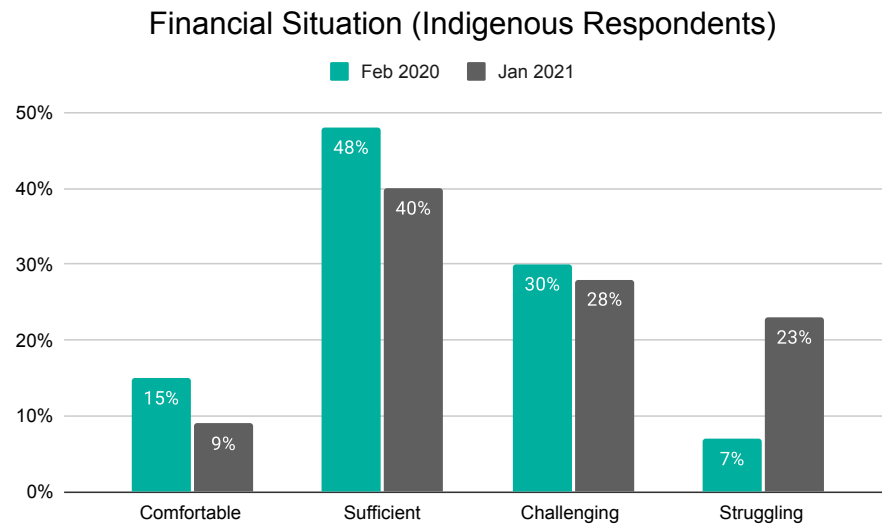
FINANCIAL SITUATION CHANGES

Survey respondents were asked how they would describe their financial situation in February 2020 (pre-pandemic), and in January 2021. Both white and BIPOC respondent groups experienced negative changes in their financial situation due to the pandemic, but BIPOC respondents were twice as likely as white respondents to indicate they were struggling financially in January 2021, as shown in the charts below. For both Indigenous and disabled respondents, the proportion of respondents who said they were struggling financially tripled between February 2020 and January 2021.

BIPOC RESPONDENTS WERE TWICE AS LIKELY AS WHITE RESPONDENTS TO INDICATE THEY WERE STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY IN JANUARY 2021.



The proportion of BIPOC respondents (30%) who had indicated they were comfortable financially prior to the pandemic dropped by nearly half to 16% in January 2021.



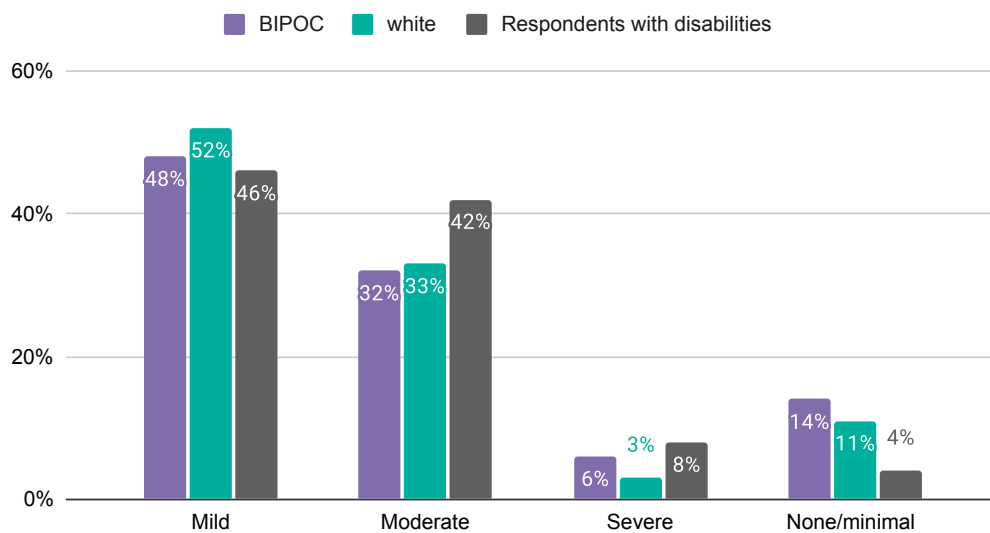
“I saw how much CERB helped the mental health and physical health of the people who received it.”

STRESS LEVELS AND MENTAL HEALTH

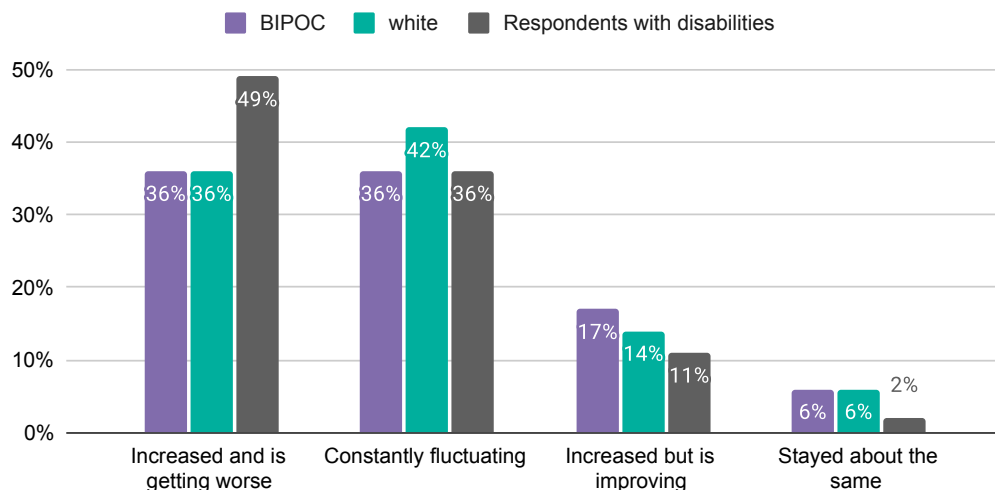
When asked about their stress levels before the pandemic and during the pandemic, both BIPOC and white respondents reported similar levels of mild, moderate, and severe stress, as seen in the chart below. Respondents with disabilities were more likely to have moderate to severe stress levels before the onset of the pandemic.

Close to 50% of respondents with disabilities indicated that their stress level had increased during the pandemic and is getting worse. For BIPOC and white respondents, 36% reported that their stress has increased and is getting worse. For Indigenous respondents, 47% reported worsening stress throughout the pandemic.

Pre-pandemic stress levels



Since COVID-19 began, how would you describe your average daily level of stress?



50% of BIPOC respondents indicated that they lived with children under the age of 18 in their homes. Of those women, 61% reported feeling overwhelmed trying to balance work and caregiving. 72% of respondents with disabilities who lived with children reported feeling overwhelmed trying to balance everything.

When asked about financial concerns, for BIPOC respondents:

- 53% were concerned about unforeseen expenses due to COVID-19
- 46% were concerned about their ability to pay bills
- 36% were concerned about their ability to buy groceries
- 37% were concerned about their ability to make rent or mortgage payments
- And 26% were concerned about the lack of paid sick/caregiving leave

For respondents with disabilities:

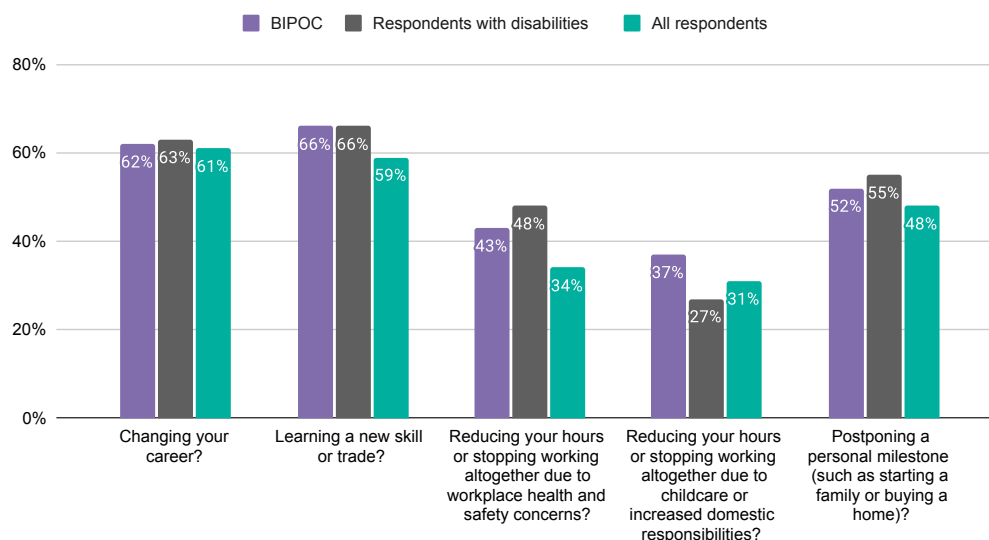
- 59% were concerned about unforeseen expenses due to COVID-19
- 53% were concerned about their ability to pay bills
- 43% were concerned about their ability to buy groceries
- 36% were concerned about their ability to make rent or mortgage payments
- And 31% were concerned about the lack of paid sick/caregiving leave

48% of respondents with disabilities and 43% of BIPOC respondents had considered reducing their hours or stopping work altogether due to workplace health and safety concerns. This was the second and third highest number of any group (the highest was retail workers at 60%).

48%
OF RESPONDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES AND 43%
OF BIPOC RESPONDENTS
HAD CONSIDERED
REDUCING THEIR HOURS
OR STOPPING WORK
ALTOGETHER DUE TO
WORKPLACE HEALTH
AND SAFETY CONCERNS.

25 BIPOC respondents indicated they found a new job during the pandemic. Four respondents found new jobs within the same industry, while six others changed industries. The other 15 did not list the industries in which they worked.

At any point since the start of the pandemic, have you questioned:



FOCUS GROUP INSIGHTS


In March 2021 we held a focus group with a local organization that supports newcomers to discuss specific challenges faced by newcomer women in Hamilton during the pandemic. 49% of BIPOC survey respondents indicated that they were not born in Canada; within that group 35% have moved to Canada within the last five years.

Participants in the focus group pointed out that newcomer women are facing similar challenges to all women in Hamilton, but many of their challenges are amplified by language barriers, and isolation from family, community, and/or religious supports. Some newcomers reported they are struggling to access technology and the internet for their children's virtual school needs.


The women in the focus group have also noticed more mental health issues with their newcomer clients and referrals to other support organizations have increased. As one settlement worker pointed out, "We welcome newcomers into our spaces and now they're isolated and alone. It's an uphill battle to connect and build communities."

THE WOMEN IN THE FOCUS GROUP HAVE ALSO NOTICED MORE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WITH THEIR NEWCOMER CLIENTS.

In the survey comments we asked participants, "What supports would be helpful to you during this pandemic?":

- 
- "Universal Basic Income. I was part of the pilot project, non-payee, and even though I didn't get the income I saw how much a huge difference it made for people. I know how much of a difference it would make for me if it was a thing. I saw how much CERB helped the mental health and physical health of the people who received it." (Response from an Indigenous person)
 - "Community-specific support. Ways to rally communities to not feel alone during a pandemic". (Response from a racialized person)
 - "Ability to stay off work to take care of my children without the fear of losing my job or being unable to afford to feed my kids because I have to choose between their mental or physical health as well as mine." (Response from an Indigenous childcare worker)
 - "Having resources to support my mental health." (Response from a racialized person)

We also asked the women if they had any additional comments about how their primary job was affected by COVID-19.

- 
- "There are not enough staff to work and [we are] working short all the time." (Response from a racialized healthcare worker)
 - "The conditions at work were not following Ontario guidelines. I chose to leave for my family's safety. They had a shortage of staff but expected to complete the same amount of work. Masks were not worn, staff did not wash their hands, 6 feet rule was broken." (Response from a racialized retail worker)