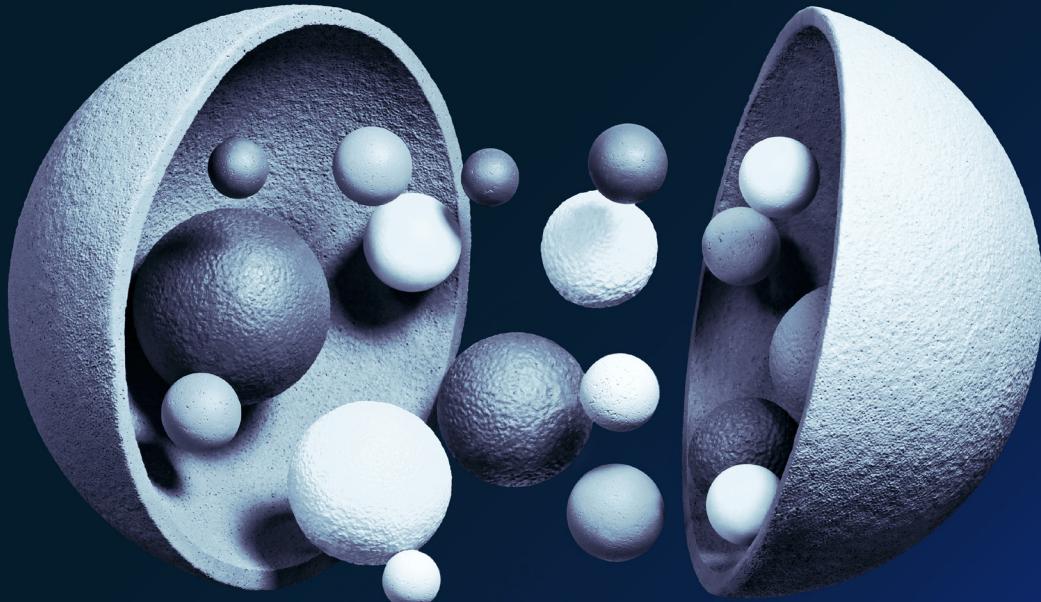


Risk Practice

COVID-19: Briefing note #54, May 12, 2021

Don't let the pandemic whittle away at the workforce.



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The pandemic has hit everyone hard, but some groups have suffered in unique ways. Working mothers, Asian Americans, and nurses are among those whose difficulties at work and at home—which for many is now the same stressful place—could result in a retreat from their careers. As employers prepare to emerge from the crisis, they must find creative ways to support the hardest-hit communities, which can require rethinking long-held beliefs.

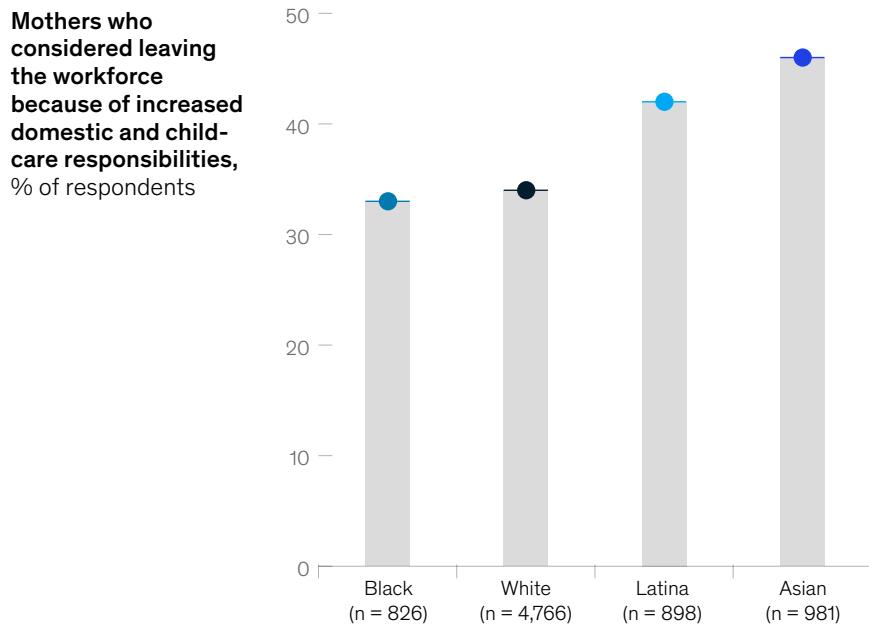
The pandemic has been brutal for working mothers, a third of whom say they are considering leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers. One of the culprits is the double shift, the eternal burden of working mothers that has gotten worse during the COVID-19 crisis and is even more troubling

for women of color (exhibit). Companies can help by providing emergency childcare and tutoring services, offering to continue remote work for those who want it, and revising hiring standards to eliminate the bias against gaps in employment.

A McKinsey survey of 400 frontline nurses revealed that 22 percent may leave their jobs providing direct patient care in the next year, a reflection of the physical and mental strain the pandemic has placed upon the profession. Employers should counteract this by improving in four key areas: providing more recognition, incentives, and breaks; offering flexible scheduling; finding opportunities for nurses to provide telemedicine services and other innovative patient-care delivery methods; and reskilling, so that nurses can keep up with technological advances.

Exhibit

Rising domestic and childcare responsibilities are top of mind for mothers who have considered leaving the workforce.



Source: *Women in the Workplace 2020*, LeanIn.Org and McKinsey, 2020

Asian Americans have long struggled for equality in the workplace, a fact reflected by their low representation in senior-level jobs relative to their representation in entry-level jobs. In a series of charts based on survey data from McKinsey's latest Women in the Workplace study, created in partnership with LeanIn.Org, we explore the negative effects the pandemic has had on Asian Americans, affecting stress levels, engagement in work, and sense of opportunity. Solutions include promoting the practice of sponsorship and expanding workplace flexibility.

McKinsey also looked at the US dairy industry's tumultuous first pandemic year, which included milk dumping in April 2020, even as some store dairy cases sat empty. Our survey of 50 US dairy CEOs in the fourth quarter of 2020, followed by interviews, revealed a sense of optimism combined with concern over changing consumer tastes. Best practices this year include being proactive about health and sustainability messaging, expanding the talent pool to include remote workers, and making supply chains more resilient.

On *The McKinsey Podcast*, former Unilever CEO Paul Polman and McKinsey senior partner Dame Vivian Hunt discuss why, increasingly, the way for

companies to deliver resilience, longevity, and growth is to build stakeholder capitalism. The pandemic illustrated how expensive it is to let a health problem fester; companies should learn this lesson and apply it to broad social issues including the environment and diversity.

Our Author Talks series features former Best Buy CEO and chairman Hubert Joly on his new book, The Heart of Business: Leadership Principles for the Next Era of Capitalism (Harvard Business Review Press, May 2021). Mr. Joly, who currently lectures at Harvard Business School, writes about what it means to lead with purpose and humanity. Our most recent edition of McKinsey for Kids introduces younger audiences to mangrove forests and explains why building a “business case” for mangroves can help protect Bengal tigers and king cobras. For more perspectives, please see the full collection of our coronavirus-related content, visual insights from our “chart of the day,” a curated collection of our first 100 articles relating to the coronavirus, our suite of tools to help leaders respond to the pandemic, and how our editors choose images that help readers visualize the impact of an invisible threat.

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