

Honoring Working Women, Just In Time For Mother's Day

Mother's Day has always been the opportunity to celebrate mom. This Mother's Day, we find ourselves in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our lives have been unexpectedly interrupted. Because we are practicing social distancing guidelines, we will not be able to take mom to her favorite restaurant for her favorite meal. Many of us won't even be able to give or receive a Mother's Day hug. The Corona virus has changed the way we live. Our mothers and mother figures are at the forefront of trying to normalize the unforeseen Covid-19 crisis. Just in time for Mother's Day let's take a minute to show appreciation for, and recognize the sacrifices of the women workers that we call Mom.

Women Among the Jobless

Covid-19 and the fear of the unknown has halted industries around the world. In the United States, by the end of April, 30 million people had filed for unemployment in the preceding six weeks since the virus began spreading across the country. More than half of those who filed were women. These statistics, however, don't tell the entire story. The Economic Policy Institute reported that 7.8 to 12 million more people attempted to file for unemployment, but were unable to because of difficulties with the filing systems. They also found that women were not only overrepresented in occupations that experienced layoffs, but they also were laid off more often than men in those same occupations.

Women workers are on the frontline in the fight against Covid-19

Since the closings of businesses around the country began in March, only those occupations deemed "essential" have been expected to have a physical presence in the workplace. These "essential" workers have labored tirelessly to provide goods and services relied on by the general population for safety, well-being, and day to day living. The New York Times reported that the majority of essential employees work in such close proximity to others, that they are at greatest risk of contracting the virus. Occupations that are literally on the front line, like healthcare workers, personal care aides, retail cashiers, and fast food workers, are dominated by women. Many of these jobs are low skilled and low waged, and offer no sick leave. Women workers are left with no choice but to work, or their families will suffer.

Women on the Homefront

A mother's never-ending responsibilities to family have been multiplied by the Covid-19 pandemic. Government has been forced to issue shelter-in-place orders around the country. School closings in response to the virus have meant children around the country are being schooled remotely, and many moms are tasked with facilitating online participation. Having kids at home also means an increase in household needs, duties, and responsibilities. Grocery

bills have increased. Access to household products has decreased. Being safe while shopping has become a priority.

Whether unemployed, “essential”, or working remotely, mothers are juggling a new, unprecedented normal. And, as mothers have done countless times before, they are making the most out of even the most challenging of times. Just in time for Mother’s Day, let’s work towards a future where workplace inequities don’t equal women being the first to be laid off in tough economic times. Just in time for Mother’s Day, let’s make sure we treat those women workers in essential jobs like they are as valued as the word “essential” implies. Just in time for Mother’s Day, let’s make sure that “essential” workers have living wages, paid sick leave, and universal health care. Just in time for Mother’s Day, let’s make sure that working women’s responsibilities to their households are considered when decisions about workplace benefits are made. Just in time for Mother’s Day in a time where the only thing we know for certain is that so many things are uncertain, let’s recognize the plight of the woman worker. Just in time for Mother’s Day, let’s use the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic to lift the voice of the woman worker and work towards change by supporting the "Essential Workers Bill of Rights," which articulates basic demands of workers who have been designated "essential" during this current global health crisis.

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