

## COVID, Labour Markets and Employment

*My stress is through the roof. I lost my mother, I lost my job, I can't make rent, or pay the bills, I have to take care of my father who has medical issues. I won't allow him to go out in public, except to dialysis which he needs to stay alive, so I do all his shopping, cleaning and cooking, which just adds to my stress — Older woman receiving CERB*

### Employment rates

COVID resulted in a substantial loss of employment. Over seventy percent of respondents were working prior to COVID, but only sixty percent were working during COVID. The change in employment rates amongst those we surveyed was similar for men and women, and for white and racialized respondents, both falling from the low seventies to around sixty percent.

Employment losses were concentrated amongst recipients of OW/ODSP and CERB/CESB. Only half of OW/ODSP respondents who were employed before COVID continued to work during COVID. Just under sixty percent of CERB/CESB respondents working prior to COVID reported working during COVID. Most respondents working prior to COVID but not in receipt of government support during COVID continued to work during COVID.

*I was working in industrial automation before COVID and that company lost a major contract as a result of COVID and laid off staff .... While looking for work, opportunities have been few and far between, and overall wages are extremely poor — I'm seeing like \$17 an hour for skilled labour jobs, way below what they should be. I strongly feel that employers are deliberately using mass unemployment as a veil to decrease already-low wages even further. Most jobs advertised are lower than the actual cost of living anywhere in Ontario — Young man receiving CERB*

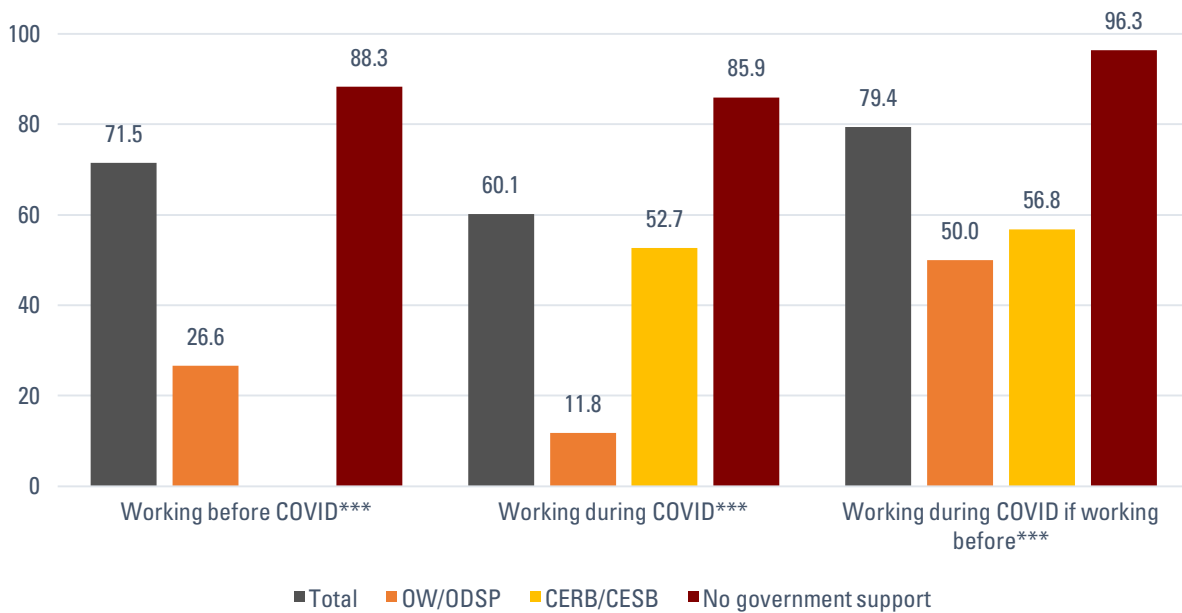
Overall, women were just about as successful as men in holding on to employment during COVID. Just over eighty percent of women working prior to COVID continued to work during COVID. Just under eighty percent of men working prior to COVID continued to work during COVID. Women were marginally more successful in remaining in employment in the private sector than men, but marginally less successful in the public and the not-for-profit sectors.

*I have always had multiple employers. I lost a substantial amount of income, and only had one employer during COVID. I was about to launch a retail business just before COVID and had to postpone. There are no real jobs, as employers offer only part-time work, for terrible pay. I am very*

*lucky I have one employer who pays me well and respects me — Middle-aged female private service sector worker*

Employment losses were more significant in the private sector compared to both the public and the not-for-profit sectors. Just over seventy percent of private sector respondents working prior to COVID continued to work during COVID. This compares to over eighty percent of public sector respondents who continued to work during COVID. Nearly ninety percent of respondents from the not-for-profit sector continued working during COVID. Unionized respondents were more likely to report remaining in employment during COVID (98.2 percent compared to non-unionized workers (91.4 percent).

**Chart 1: Pre- and post-COVID employment status by type of government support (%)**



\* p<.10 \*\* p<=.05 \*\*\*p<=.001

Our finding that women were relatively successful in holding on to their employment is partially explained by the fact that the women in our sample were more likely than men to be essential workers, more likely to be employed in the public sector and more likely to be unionized. Job losses for all of these categories of workers were lower than in the labour market as a whole. Women were four times as likely to be employed in K-12 schools and twice as likely to be in healthcare compared to men. Men were four times as likely to be employed in construction and twice as likely to be employed in manufacturing compared to women.

## Earnings

There were substantial changes in monthly employment earnings because of COVID. Over thirty percent of recipients who continued to work during COVID reported their monthly income from employment decreased while about thirteen percent reported their monthly income increased. Some of these differences were related to who received supplemental pandemic pay during COVID and who did not.

*I feel that as a person who was required to attend work, as an "essential worker", I should have received the pandemic pay. There are divisions at my workplace, who did receive this extra wage, and it has caused unrest at our workplace as a result of what is seen as unfair treatment. I feel that ALL employees who worked throughout this stressful time should receive the same recognition — Middle-aged female office worker*

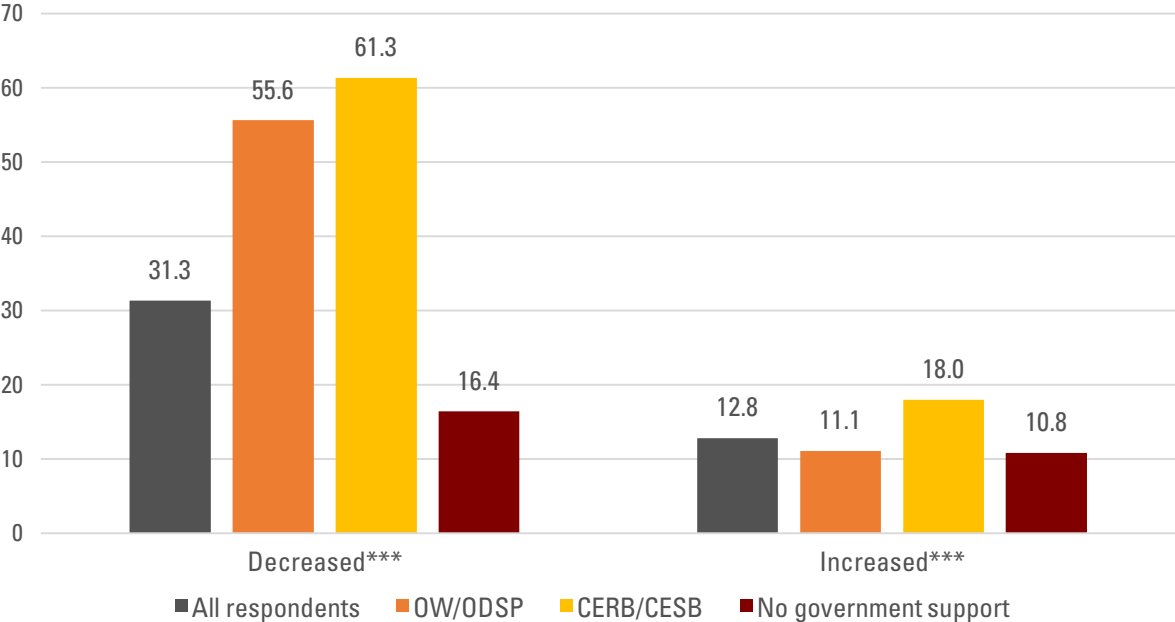
Not all categories of employed respondents had the same experience. Over half of OW/ODSP recipients who continued to work during COVID reported their monthly employment income fell during COVID. Over sixty percent of CERB/CESB recipients reported their income fell. Just over fifteen percent of respondents not receiving government support during COVID reported their employment income fell while almost eleven percent reported their income increased.

Just under thirty-five percent of men reported their employment income fell during COVID compared to just under thirty percent of women.

*Since COVID-19 my otherwise flexible schedule is NO MORE. I work more days per week but not as many hours. I believe I have lost \$1000/month income. My third contract was supposed to help increase my income but COVID changed that — Middle-aged self-employed woman receiving CERB*

Over half of respondents in the private sector reported their income fell during COVID compared to less than twenty percent of respondents in the public and not-for-profit sectors. Male and female respondents, and white and racialized respondents, reported similar changes in employment income during COVID.

**Chart 2: Change in monthly employment income during COVID by type of government support (%)**



\* p<.10 \*\* p<=.05 \*\*\*p<=.001

This factsheet is co-authored by Mohammad Ferdosi, Dr. Peter Graefe, Dr. Wayne Lewchuk and Dr. Stephanie Ross, who are the co-investigators in the **COVID Economic and Social Effects Study (CESES)** at McMaster University. CESES is a collaboration between the School of Labour Studies, the Department of Political Science, and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and is supported by funding from MITACS and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. For other factsheets in the series, go to the CESES project website: <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/research/covid19-impact>