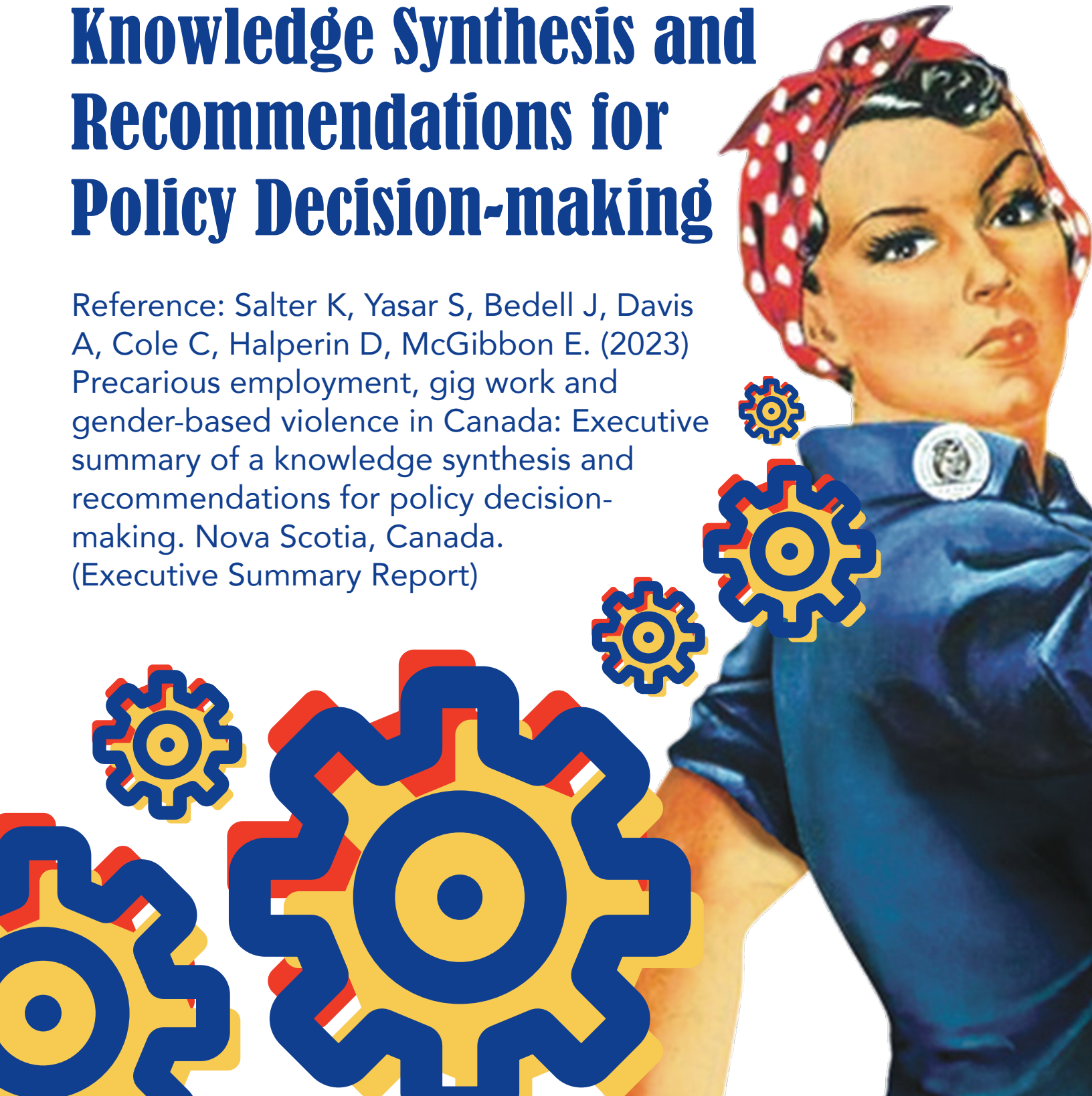


Precarious Employment, Gig Work and Gender-based Violence in Canada: Executive Summary of a Knowledge Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy Decision-making

Reference: Salter K, Yasar S, Bedell J, Davis A, Cole C, Halperin D, McGibbon E. (2023) Precarious employment, gig work and gender-based violence in Canada: Executive summary of a knowledge synthesis and recommendations for policy decision-making. Nova Scotia, Canada. (Executive Summary Report)



This page is intentionally left blank.

Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence directed towards another person because of gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender (1). It is a term that includes many forms of violence, including domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV).

Traditional workplaces can sometimes offer safe spaces away from violence occurring in the home – but GBV can also be associated with workplace disruptions, absences, and declining performance, causing unstable access to employment. In addition, the need to juggle work with traditional gender roles, including childcare and domestic responsibilities, limits employment options for many women.

Finding flexible work, like short-term or informal “gigs” helps women fill these needs. However, **gig work is temporary, usually low-paying, and uncertain**. While these jobs allow women to work remotely on their own schedule, they also lack access to the benefits, supports and protections gained from having a standard employment relationship and traditional workplace.



Project Objectives

This project explored how **economic insecurity, gender, and violence** are connected. We also wanted to understand how ethnicity, ability, age, and gender intersect with gig employment and the risk for GBV.

Through a **knowledge synthesis**, we focused on current publications to explore the experiences of women engaged in informal, uncertain (precarious) work – like gig work and the risk for or experience of GBV.

Partnership with **Women's Centres Connect of Nova Scotia** supported a process of knowledge exchange, enriched our understanding, and supported the creation of **evidence-informed policy recommendations** for future decision-making that reflects community needs and priorities.

These recommendations will inform research, policy, and programs to support economic stability and prevent GBV.

Report Summary

Gig work is a serious and growing concern, as 61% of the world's working-age population (approximately six billion people) are informally employed (2). In Canada, precarious employment has increased by more than 50% over the past two decades (3). From 2005 to 2016, participation in gig work alone rose faster than other types of work classified as self-employment (4). By 2016, 9.5% of Canadians reported involvement in the gig economy (5). Although the number of men and women participating in platform-based gig work are approximately equal, less than 1% of the available literature surrounding this field is female-focused, leaving gendered experiences of gig work severely under-researched (6).

Women from equity-deserving groups, such as BIPOC women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and immigrant women, are over-represented in gig and other precarious and non-standard work. In addition to racial discrimination, newcomer or migrant women who work as domestic caregivers through care-based platforms may be placed into situations that threaten their health and safety. Working conditions are often poor, and no training is provided to workers who may be asked to provide specialized care for clients with illness or limited mobility (7). The care-based platforms responsible for paying workers may apply penalties, including reduced pay and restricted job access if the client reports inadequate services (7). Workers have little support to prevent unsuitable working conditions, refusal of payment, or bad reviews. Complaints to a platform about harassment, poor working conditions, or missing pay could impact access to income and negatively influence residency status and work permits for newcomer or migrant women (7). As equity-deserving groups are disproportionately impacted within the gig economy, it is essential to understand the underlying conditions of informal labour and the challenges women face within the gig economy, especially for Indigenous women and women in rural/remote areas.

Our research found that digital platforms have contributed to the increased accessibility and availability of gig work (8). Platform-based gig work is only one type of possible gig work which sells labour as a product (9). The platform may coordinate hiring, client matching, setting terms and conditions, supervision and discipline, and payment (8,9). Platforms do not usually manage the client/labour relationship, which may promote flexibility in completing tasks, seemingly offering some worker autonomy (7,8). People often see gig work as a flexible way to make money (10–12).

Many mothers find themselves in precarious working positions, including part-time, temporary, short-term, and underpaid jobs (13,14). Higher unemployment rates for mothers have led to their under-representation in secure, high-paying jobs (14). However, for mothers responsible for caring for young children, choosing their own work, hours, and even location supports their efforts to balance the need to make money while fulfilling domestic and childcare roles and responsibilities (6,15). Mothers who engage in gig work may not otherwise have been able to access affordable childcare options (6). While one might understand the benefits of platform-based work flexibility in this context, it does little to support the movement away from social constructions that position mothers as the primary caregivers within a traditional framework of domestic roles.

Apps and other digital work platforms claim to be fair and equal to all genders. However, their technology rules and systems do not consider the intersectionality of their employees, or the unique challenges faced by women in the workforce. Although the number of profiles registered on many online platforms may be fairly even between men and women, there are still gendered participation trends (10). Women tend to engage in different types of work or tasks than men – participating more frequently in customer service, administration and clerical support, legal work, translation tasks, writing services, sales, marketing, and domestic and care services (6,10,15,16). Gendered roles and responsibilities for child or family care also shape women's ability to compete for gigs posted on a platform (6,17). With less available time and fewer ratings, their online visibility and subsequent gigs decrease, as women are penalized for having to balance gig work with traditional gender roles (6). Women also appear to register more hours worked but earn less per hour than their male counterparts, even when comparing the same work or tasks performed by individuals with similar reported educational backgrounds, previous work experience, and feedback scores recorded by the platform (10,18). There is a concerning wage gap within the gig economy. Men in formal employment make 26% more than in informal jobs, while women make 14% more when employed formally (19). Women also earn less than informally employed men (19). It has been suggested that, within the gender-neutral platform environment, the ideal worker remains the able-bodied male worker whose time is flexible and free of caring responsibilities (17). Despite the increasing number of women reported to be engaged in gig work via digital platforms, very few studies have focused on women's experiences within the context of platform-mediated work (6,20). Assumptions that platforms function as inclusive, gender-neutral environments may increase women's marginalization through risk for bias and harassment (9,20).

COVID-19 brought notable changes to women's employment status around the world. Early in the pandemic, a general trend emerged, showing that women experienced a more pronounced employment decline than men, which appears to have continued throughout the crisis (21). Of note, however, is that more women shifted from being employed to being outside or removed from the labour force, which contributed to a 1.7 times greater proportionate loss for women than men in various countries (22). Stay-at-home directives, school closures, and the loss of dependent services have led to a resurgence of traditional domestic roles, where women are expected to adjust their professional commitments to meet household demands due to public health directives (22). Mothers have more often left or reduced their paid work to support gendered domestic roles (e.g., domestic and childcare responsibilities) during the pandemic (14,21). While working from home appeared to support a combination of paid and unpaid work, the transition to remote, at-home working conditions created a "double burden" for women, leading to higher levels of stress, longer working hours, and significant challenges to productivity (22–27). In addition, these types of employment relationships often fall outside the protections afforded by social safety nets, including programs created to lessen the pandemic's economic impacts (e.g., CERB). Remote work is also isolating and has limited social interactions, contributing to feelings of anxiety and separation among women (23).

The term 'she-cession,' coined to describe the COVID-19 pandemic recession highlights the disproportionate burden of job loss and economic instability experienced by women, and the conditions that support the experience of these inequities (21,22,28). The 'she-cession' is a complex crisis that has heightened systemic inequities within our economic systems, hitting women in precarious employment and gig work especially hard. In general, women were over-represented in low-paid, part-time, and temporary employment types, as well as in "unsafe jobs" during COVID-19 within feminized employment sectors (e.g., healthcare, domestic and caring services, retail, hospitality and entertainment) (28–31). Lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing strategies have also led to significant job losses in feminized sectors (22,25,28,31). The job loss or weakening ties to standard employment relationships within the job market, in addition to the gender wage gap, may have limited any progress made toward gender equity or women's economic empowerment (21,25,28,32). With the implementation of COVID-19 lockdown measures, a surge in GBV, specifically IPV and DV was observed, often associated with living situations and economic stressors (22,28,33–36). The dynamics of GBV were not only in the household. Precarious employment conditions during the pandemic, including gig work, were associated with an increase in GBV incidents. For women working remotely, the change in working conditions did not alleviate the situation; instances of bullying, stalking, and mobbing translated into the virtual space, further highlighting the nature of GBV under the pandemic conditions (23,37).

Precarious employment and informal labour present complex, multi-layered issues associated with gender disparities, poor working conditions, and digital platform challenges. Within **the gig economy is a gendered cycle of insecurity**, as individuals already experiencing economic insecurity are likely to have insecure and low-paying precarious employment, leading to more financial instability (38,39). Precarious working conditions also increase stress, as unpredictable work and income can lead to unmet basic needs (40). Thus, the cycle repeats - financial instability fosters job insecurity, exacerbating financial instability, leading to chronic stress and more insecurity.

While approximately 44% of workers globally may be self-employed, significant variations exist across developed and developing economies (2). Each type of possible self-employment may have a different level of security and stability previously discussed, highlighting the uncertainty of this type of work. Precarious employment and the rise of independent contractors reshape labour markets, leading to a complex mix of opportunities, insecurities, and disparities. Workers in precarious employment face significant obstacles to accessing essential resources, which can directly affect their health. As a type of precarious, non-standard employment, platform-based gig workers share similar risks and vulnerabilities with individuals engaged in other forms of precarious employment (5). Precarious workers often lack access to essential resources such as employer-based health insurance and union membership (41).

Numerous vulnerabilities are associated with the structure, function and balance of power established within platform-based gig work, making women in these roles even more vulnerable. Some of these **vulnerabilities** include:

The nature of platform-based gig work itself (e.g., socially dispersed, isolating, invisible) lacks supports or protections seen in regular employment, increasing the risk for violence and exposing women as easy targets (20).

Creating supportive connections and communicating between workers is also discouraged, as is reporting unsafe working conditions, attacks, or harassment from clients (20).

Classifying these platform-based gig workers as “self-employed” or “independent contractors” rather than employees restricts workers’ access to formal benefits, support, and protections. Removing women from the workplace makes it harder for them to receive minimum wage, overtime pay, and unemployment insurance (9,10,12).

Women experience an uneven burden of childcare and domestic responsibilities compared to men. As women have turned to digital platforms to stay connected to the labour market, gig work increases demand on personal resources and can have significant negative impacts (21,22).



Creating Recommendations for Policy Decision-making

Addressing vulnerabilities associated with loss of workplace, strengthening social policy related to child and dependent care, and providing longer-term, stable investments in funding for policy and programs to reduce social and economic barriers experienced by women are essential to prevent GBV. Policy decision-makers need to consider the people impacted by the policy. Social policies and protections must be gender-responsive and place-based, considering women's unique experiences and challenges in the gig economy.

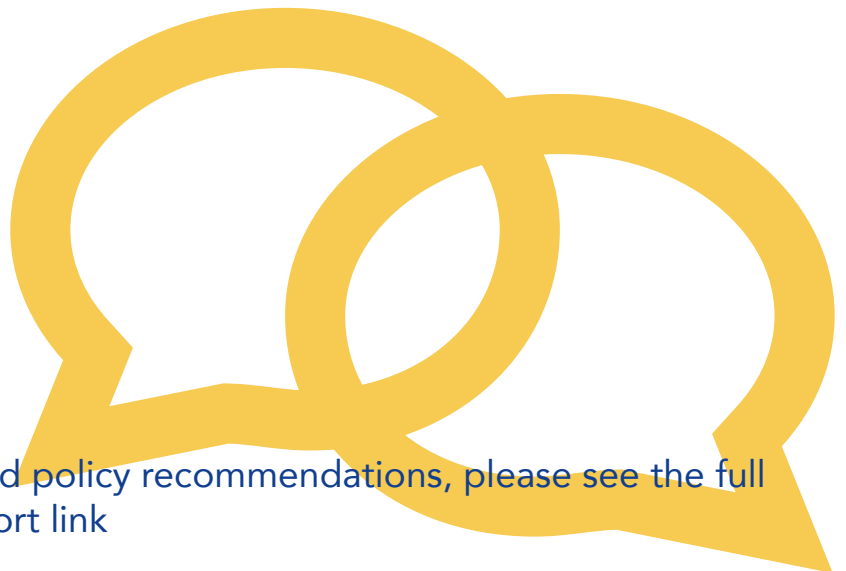
This report provides recommendations for research, policy, and programs that reflect the priorities identified by our community partners and are supported by existing literature. Two significant areas of policy decision making that could have substantial and immediate positive impacts on women's participation in the gig economy are:



Change **labour code worker classification** and the provision of measurable mechanisms for improved accessibility to worker rights, supports, benefits and protections.



Provide access to **universal child and dependent care** to help women reconcile the demands of care provision and other domestic roles with the demands of employment. This includes adoption of family-friendly parental and family leave and harmonized parental leaves (not tied to workplace classification). Access to child and dependent care, in addition to family-friendly leave policy, supports engagement in training and skills development to facilitate economic empowerment.



To read more about our research and policy recommendations, please see the full report accessed here: [insert full report link](#)

References

1. Women and Gender Equality Canada. (2021, March 31). What is gender-based violence? <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-violence/about-gender-based-violence.html#what>
2. Bonnet, F., Vanek, J., & Chen, M. (2019). Women and men in the informal economy – A statistical brief. <https://www.wiego.org/publications/women-and-men-informal-economy-statistical-brief>
3. Premji, S. (2017). Precarious employment and difficult daily commutes. *Relations Industrielles*, 72(1), 77–98. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039591ar>
4. Jeon, S.-H., Liu, H., & Ostrovsky, Y. (2021). Measuring the gig economy in Canada using administrative data. *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue Canadienne d'économique*, 54(4), 1638–1666. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12558>
5. Bajwa, U., Knorr, L., Ruggiero, E. D., Gastaldo, D., & Zendel, A. (2018). Towards an understanding of workers' experiences in the global gig economy. Global Migration and Health Initiative. https://www.glomhi.org/uploads/7/4/4/8/74483301/workers_in_the_global_gig_economy.pdf
6. James, A. (2022). Women in the gig economy: Feminising 'digital labour.' *Work in the Global Economy*, 2(1), 2–26. <https://doi.org/10.1332/273241721X16448410652000>
7. Rodríguez-Modroño, P., Agenjo-Calderón, A., & López-Igual, P. (2022). Platform work in the domestic and home care sector: New mechanisms of invisibility and exploitation of women migrant workers. *Gender & Development*, 30(3), 619–635. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2022.2121060>
8. Ziegler, E., McCallum, K. E., Porter, K., & Noshiravani, R. (2020). Understanding the nature and experience of gig work in Canada. *Skills Next*. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/understanding-the-nature-and-experience-of-gig-work-in-canada>
9. Gray, P. C. (2022). "The Same Tools Work Everywhere": Organizing gig workers with foodsters United. *Labour / Le Travail*, 90(1), 41–84. <https://www.muse.-jhu.edu/article/870057>.
10. Renan Barzilay, A., & Ben-David, A. (2017). Platform inequality: Gender in the gig-economy. *Seton Hall Law Review*, 47(393). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2995906>
11. Harpel, E. (2019). Gig and independent work. *The IEDC Economic Development Journal*, 18(3), 18–24.
12. Khan, T. H., MacEachen, E., & Dunstan, D. (2022). What social supports are available to self-employed people when ill or injured? A comparative policy analysis of Canada and Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(9), 5310. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19095310>

13. Kim, J., & Golden, L. (2022). Inadequacy inequality: The distribution and consequences of part-time underemployment in the US. *Community, Work & Family*, 25(1), 84–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2021.1985433>
14. Hupkau, C., & Ruiz-Valenzuela, J. (2022). Work and children in Spain: Challenges and opportunities for equality between men and women. *SERIEs*, 13(1–2), 243–268. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13209-021-00243-7>
15. Shea, T., Brodsky, D. N., Cooper, B., Sheehan, C., Donohue, R., & Cieri. (2020). On-demand economy in Victoria: A survey report. Monash Business School, Monash University, Caulfield East, VIC, Australia. https://research.iscrr.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/2423106/243_On-demand-economy-survey-report-2020-03-26-Final-version-submitted-to-WSV.pdf
16. Ticona, J., & Mateescu, A. (2018). Trusted strangers: Carework platforms' cultural entrepreneurship in the on-demand economy. *New Media & Society*, 20(11), 4384–4404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818773727>
17. Webster, N. A., & Zhang, Q. (2020). Careers delivered from the Kitchen? Immigrant women small-scale entrepreneurs working in the growing Nordic platform economy. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 28(2), 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2020.1714725>
18. Foong, E., Vincent, N., Hecht, B., & Gerber, E. M. (2018). Women (still) ask for less: Gender differences in hourly rate in an online labor marketplace. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 2(CSCW), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3274322>
19. Williams, C., & Gashi, A. (2021). Evaluating the wage differential between the formal and informal economy: A gender perspective. *Journal of Economic Studies*, 49(4), 735–750. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JES-01-2021-0019>
20. Ma, N. F., Rivera, V. A., Yao, Z., & Yoon, D. (2022). "Brush it Off": How women workers manage and cope with bias and harassment in gender-agnostic gig platforms. *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3491102.3517524>
21. Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). This time it's different: The role of women's employment in a pandemic recession (Working Paper 27660). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w27660>
22. Albrecht, C., Endl-Geyer, V., & Stitteneder, T. (2021). Covid-19: Reinforcing gender gaps? *CESifo Forum*, 22(5), 50–57. <https://www.cesifo.org/en/publications/2021/article-journal/covid-19-reinforcing-gender-gaps>
23. De Gennaro, D., Loia, F., & Piscopo, G. (2022). Working role of women in a pandemic world: A poetic inquiry. *Management Research Review*, 45(11), 1373–1392. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-06-2021-0430>
24. Caki, E. (2022). The plight of female employment in Germany under school-related COVID-19 control measures. *The CoronaNet Researchers Working Paper Series*, Article 04/2022. <https://ideas.repec.org//p/ayl/wpaper/202204.html>

25. Dang, H.-A. H., & Viet Nguyen, C. (2021). Gender inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic: Income, expenditure, savings, and job loss. *World Development*, 140, 105296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105296>
26. Escudero-Castillo, I., Mato-Díaz, Fco. J., & Rodríguez-Alvarez, A. (2023). Psychological well-being during the COVID-19 lockdown: Labour market and gender implications. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 18(1), 71–91. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-022-10113-4>
27. Farré, L., Fawaz, Y., González, L., & Graves, J. (2022). Gender inequality in paid and unpaid work during Covid-19 times. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 68(2), 323–347. <https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12563>
28. Bahri, A. (2020). Women at the frontline of COVID-19: Can gender mainstreaming in free trade agreements help? *Journal of International Economic Law*, 23(3), 563–582. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jgaa023>
29. Basso, G., Boeri, T., Caiumi, A., & Paccagnella, M. (2022). Unsafe jobs, labour market risk and social protection. *Economic Policy*, 37(110), 229–267. <https://doi.org/10.1093/epolic/eiac004>
30. Baylis, P., Beauregard, P., Connolly, M., Fortin, N. M., Green, D. A., Gutiérrez-Cubillos, P., Gyetvay, S., Haeck, C., Molnár, T. L., Simard-Duplain, G., Siu, H. E., teNyenhuis, M., & Warman, C. (2022). The distribution of COVID-19–related risks. *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue Canadienne d'économique*, 55(S1), 172–213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12540>
31. Graeber, D., Kritikos, A. S., & Seebauer, J. (2021). COVID-19: A crisis of the female self-employed. *Journal of Population Economics*, 34(4), 1141–1187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-021-00849-y>
32. Cook, R., & Grimshaw, D. (2021). A gendered lens on COVID-19 employment and social policies in Europe. *European Societies*, 23(sup1), S215–S227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1822538>
33. Arenas-Arroyo, E., Fernandez-Kranz, D., & Nollenberger, N. (2021). Intimate partner violence under forced cohabitation and economic stress: Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Public Economics*, 194, 104350. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104350>
34. Béland, L.-P., Brodeur, A., Haddad, J., & Mikola, D. (2020). Covid-19, family stress and domestic violence: Remote work, isolation and bargaining power. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3627031>
35. Béland, L.-P., Brodeur, A., Haddad, J., & Mikola, D. (2021). Determinants of family stress and domestic violence: Lessons from the COVID-19 outbreak. *Canadian Public Policy*, 47(3), 439–459. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-119>
36. Bhalotra, S., Brito, E., Clarke, D., Larroulet, P., Pino, F. J., & UNU-WIDER. (2021). Dynamic impacts of lockdown on domestic violence: Evidence from multiple policy shifts in Chile (WIDER Working Paper 2021; WIDER Working Paper, Vol. 2021). UNU-WIDER. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2021/129-7>

37. Flor, L. S., Friedman, J., Spencer, C. N., Cagney, J., Arrieta, A., Herbert, M. E., Stein, C., Mullany, E. C., Hon, J., Patwardhan, V., Barber, R. M., Collins, J. K., Hay, S. I., Lim, S. S., Lozano, R., Mokdad, A. H., Murray, C. J. L., Reiner, R. C., Sorensen, R. J. D., ... Gakidou, E. (2022). Quantifying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality on health, social, and economic indicators: A comprehensive review of data from March, 2020, to September, 2021. *The Lancet*, 399(10344), 2381–2397. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(22\)00008-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)00008-3)
38. Ali, W. K., & Newbold, K. B. (2021). Gender, space, and precarious employment in Canada. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 112(5), 566–588. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12488>
39. Allan, B. A., Kim, T., Liu, T. Y., & Deemer, E. D. (2020). Moderators of involuntary part-time work and life satisfaction: A latent deprivation approach. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 51(3), 257–267. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000268>
40. Allan, B. A., Kim, T., & Shein, B. (2022). Underemployment and mental health: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 69(5), 578–588. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000610>
41. Eisenberg-Guyot, J., Peckham, T., Andrea, S. B., Oddo, V., Seixas, N., & Hajat, A. (2020). Life-course trajectories of employment quality and health in the U.S.: A multichannel sequence analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*, 264, 113327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113327>