

## Monday March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 International Women's Day.

Last week, I watched my computer screen as email after email displayed some version of “Celebrating Women” in the headline. Some were from networking groups commending the achievements of women, others were pleas from nonprofits to join their cause, and others from businesses aimed at soliciting positive, therefore profitable, attention from women.

Of all days this was a day when I should have written a new blog. Championing women, their rights, their causes, the need for equity in their lives, the lack of access to healthcare comes second nature to me; it's the foundation of my lifework.

I could find excuses. I wasn't inspired, I didn't have time, I was under the weather over the weekend.

But the truth is I could not write.

I'm not sure women are celebrated, at least not yet, not internationally, not even down the street, especially after this past year.

The pandemic took such a toll on women; one that may never be righted. The recession of 2020 has been labeled a 'she-cession' as the loss of jobs and the economic downturn disproportionately affected women.

The loss of jobs impacted women so much more than men. They were among the first to lose work. **At one point, women had lost 5.3M jobs during the pandemic. That brought the** women's labor force down to a discouraging a 33-year low. In other words, women are no better off in 2020 than in 1987. **The gender pay gap rears its ugly head.** Economists estimate the pandemic could increase the gap from 81 cents on the dollar to 76 cents compared to same job and pay held by men. That is better than in 1987 when it was at 66 cents, but not by much. How will this gap impact retirement plans? Simply put women will have to work longer to achieve the same retirement income they expected prior to 2020.

The devastating impact of the here and now is real. Nearly a million women who have left the workforce are mothers. Black, Hispanic, and single moms are among the most affected. The service industry was hit the hardest, where women make up 49% of entry-level jobs. In January, unemployment stood at 6.3% among women. It was 5.1% for white women vs. 7.9% for Asian women, 8.5% for Black women, and 8.8% for Latinas.

Those women who managed to keep working are expected to be 'on' 24/7. They can barely cope with the pressure of handling demanding work assignments at the same level as pre-pandemic expectations while working remotely and juggling children at home who need help with schoolwork. These same women are also caring for elderly parents, all the while watching the loneliness chip away at their once robust mother or father.

As my friend and colleague, Lori Choi, MD, says: “Women are taking it on the chin.”

I've seen the stress on the faces of my own female staff. I've seen their shoulders slumped with weariness and heard the exhaustion in their voice. Still they keep going. I know most of them, like the rest of women in the world are now working three to four more hours a day than pre-pandemic. They must just to keep up. The hours for work, hours for children, hours for home chores, hours for parents all add up. Their mental health is in jeopardy.

If all this wasn't enough, reports of domestic violence and abuse have risen by 30%. Another casualty of the pandemic. But I'll save that topic for the next article.

Another White House council has been formed to study the problems of gender equity wage gaps. How long will it be studied, policies coordinated but not fixed?

Women celebrated? Of course, they are in the hearts of those who love them.

Still, I hope it is not too late to find solutions to these real-life problems. Thirty-three years is a long time to play catch up.

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**March 2021**