

# Gendered labour and work, even in pandemic times

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Pandemic times. COVID-19. Many hundreds of thousands of people across the globe have died. At best health and economic systems are strained, with the pandemic exposing racial, social and political vulnerabilities. Threats caused by the pandemic are compounded by the challenges of climate change and environmental uncertainty, threats to Indigenous land rights, poverty and risks to vulnerable communities. Surrounded by uncertainty, fear and anxiety on the one hand, and complacency, ignorance and business as usual on the other, we are living through challenging times. Globally, we are witnessing the gendered and racialized ways individuals are bearing the brunt of fragile economic and political systems with escalating unemployment, and lack of institutional governance and care for individuals. The pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities, with large parts of the Global South and minority communities and certain immigrant populations across the globe facing economic, health and social disaster. All of this taking place and intersecting at a time when toxic masculinities have become (almost) normalized as a means to lead and dominate citizens in many countries, including the United States, Russia, Turkey, North Korea and other nations.

As feminist scholars, we note how these pre-existing intersectional inequalities are amplified by the pandemic, with women on the economic margins most affected and something we see in our own personal and professional lives even amid our privilege. Intersectional inequalities sustained by patriarchy and capitalist systems are becoming more apparent and visible. Feminism's progress risks becoming undone unless recognition of women's labour and work is addressed, including its racialized dimensions. This starts with documenting gendered lives and researching deepening inequalities that are continued and perpetuated during pandemic times. Women's roles and labour in their communities, in their workplaces and in their homes (if they have them) require recognition of the disproportionate financial, physical and emotional struggles they continue to experience. Lockdown in many parts of the world has seen gender-based violence become a 'shadow pandemic' with medical, economic, and social resources and infrastructure urgently needed. The pandemic has exposed the care work done by women — paid and unpaid child and elderly care. Institutions, including government, health organizations and universities, are organizing in constant states of unknowing and flux. Ignoring the gendered impact of COVID-19 will impede economic recovery and prolong the crisis.

This issue is the compilation of submissions received to the 'Feminism in Times of COVID-19' call of the Feminist Frontiers section of *Gender, Work and Organization*. Out of a sense of relationship building, solidarity and resistance, we wanted to capture the experiences of living and working in pandemic times. We called for discussions on how the current pandemic we are living through affects our lives and livelihoods. As feminists living and possibly struggling with the demands placed on us, we wished to foster dialogue that involves discussions of how to live a feminist life during COVID-19, while attending to the various ways intersectional, postcolonial, transnational, queer and other frameworks can help us understand and relate to the struggles, failures and resilience experienced. Where did we get the energy from? We still can't answer. Locked down in our US and Australian homes working and teaching with children home from school, we received an overwhelming reaction to our call. These papers, whilst adding to our workload, helped us

make sense of our daily realities and gave us connection as we engaged in shared experiences with our contributors. This call reminded us once again of the importance of our feminist community, beyond being a journal.

Whilst our call remains open, with more than a score of papers in production and many more in review, this issue of *Gender, Work and Organization* houses 27 papers which were the first to be accepted for publication. These papers are published here in the order in which they were accepted. From the inception of this journal it has been accepted that labour and work is gendered, yet the realities of those writing about the experiences of their national labour markets and work environments demonstrate that gender recognition is still marginalized. The pandemic has made the gendered nature of work more apparent and is now receiving escalated attention of the hidden inequities in the allocation, value and reward of paid labour and work.

This 'Gendered Labour and Work, Even in Pandemic Times' issue evidences living through pandemic times, the micro-politics at play and the threats to the identities of women, parents, academics and in some papers the genocide of populations and ethnic and racial identities. Our contributors and contributions span the globe, addressing issues from the gendered social consequences of digital surveillance through to living in isolation and the experiences of loneliness. Gendered analysis of organizations, including universities and the police, highlights issues of organizational responsibility and ethics required to govern during the pandemic, including a reminder of our role as researchers to work with and develop conceptual critique such as relational ethics. Women's labour as carers, academics, mothers, leaders, medical officers, psychologists demonstrate the care and leadership work being done. Intersectional differences are highlighted, including recognizing that some lives challenge the ideal worker and ideal academic – and the ideal woman. The struggles between paid and unpaid work, and the recognition of child and elderly care work is apparent. Struggles against patriarchy and neoliberal expectations and regimes that influence women's autonomy are presented, including questioning women's productivity. Feminist reflections, perspectives and feminist resistance against neoliberalism and patriarchy are presented, demonstrating the power of solidarity through storying lives. Embodied lives fall onto the page, and we are reminded of the importance of recognizing the diversity of bodies such as vulnerable and dependent bodies and how this diversity matters to daily and organizational lives and matters of governance. Feminism's role in managing the pandemic through crisis management is developed, through an ethics of care. And, we are reminded that we need to think and organize differently – perhaps feminism's future needed a pandemic to remind us of what is at stake unless we unite and resist, united in the aim for equality even if it means dismantling our own privilege.

This diverse collection is political in that it speaks against regimes that control the lives and bodies of citizens. We hope we have contributed to building a shared, yet fragmented, language that embodies feminist principles of care in our community. Inspired by the response, we archive the struggles, inequalities and discrimination in this issue (and future issues) so that these voices and texts inspire, provide connection, hope and resistance as we move forward. The pandemic has catapulted us into questioning states, institutions and ourselves. Thinking about a liveable future requires us to act with a sense of urgency, an urgency to recognize gender inequality as central to economic, social, health and political recovery. At the same time, we reflect on the subjectivities that remain silent and lives that remain absent in the pages of this issue and are reminded of the various ways in which feminisms globally require collective and ongoing commitment from those of us in positions of privilege and power.