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Why Childcare Must Be a Priority to Restart the Economy

Patricia A. Boling, Purdue University

Recent reports about the “feminization” of unemployment, the long-term impact of this on women’s earnings and career advancement, and sound bites from debates and Vice President Joe Biden’s campaign stump speeches have focused on women’s vulnerability during the Covid crisis. Small wonder, as we face a third spike in cases, that mothers are more likely than fathers to quit their jobs or cut their hours to stay home and care for their children who are doing distance learning or unable to attend childcare. What can Americans do to dig themselves out of this ever-deepening hole?

In America, our approach to caring for and educating preschoolers is market-based. We expect parents to pay for childcare and preschool on their own dime so that they can work. As a result, the average American family spends nearly one third of their income on childcare, a small fortune compared to the 4 to 10 percent spent by families in Scandinavian nations, where childcare is paid for on a sliding scale and subsidized by the government.