



**Results of  
the USW National Women's Committee's  
2021 Survey Regarding the  
Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Steelworkers**

Prepared by: The USW National Women's Committee with Adrie Naylor, Staff Representative, Research,  
Public Policy and Bargaining Department, USW Canadian National Office

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## Executive Summary

This survey, conducted in the spring and early summer of 2021, aimed to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our members' paid and unpaid work, their union involvement, and their mental health. The USW's National Women's Committee asked for the survey because it was concerned about the gendered impact of the pandemic and the resulting stress and potential impact on our union's women members.

The survey looked at how the pandemic was affecting members in five main areas:

1. Paid work
2. Unpaid work (such as childcare and other work in the home) and leisure
3. Involvement in union activities, including running for elected positions
4. Mental health
5. Opinions and quality of life related to racist violence and injustice and the fight for racial justice

This report has three appendices. The first summarizes the recommendations made by the National Women's Committee upon review of the survey results. The second reviews the participation of Steelworkers in this survey. The third includes the questions asked in the survey.

This survey provides critical information about how members' work was organized during the pandemic. While most employers report on the numbers laid off and for how long, they cannot tell us members were working remotely to some extent. This survey does.

The survey also gathered information about unpaid work and leisure within the household. Its results show not only how that work was shared before the pandemic, but whether some Steelworkers took on more unpaid work, particularly childcare, as schools and daycares were closed and other more informal childcare arrangements were disrupted.

As the National Women's Committee suspected, unpaid work within the home, including childcare, was not equally shared within the household. While the pandemic created stress for all Steelworkers, many household tasks continue to be disproportionately the responsibility of women.<sup>1</sup> There was a massive increase in some members' unpaid work

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents to the survey were asked to share their gender identity. As Appendix 1 shows, some members identify as non-binary/third gender. However, there were too few responses from members identifying as non-binary/third gender to draw general conclusions about their experience during the pandemic. That is why

load, as they reported twisting themselves into pretzels trying to manage the increase in stress and home responsibilities in a context where supports for families from employers, the government, and the community were few and far between. Many members reported that their employers were not flexible and that their paid work also increased during the pandemic. The overall mental health situation described by members is a dire one. This stress was exacerbated by reports of loneliness and isolation, as well as the mental health impact of racial violence that increased during the pandemic.

Our union cares about workers' experiences on the job *and* their experiences at home. Our lives do not begin and end when we clock in and out of work. Steelworkers understand that the union has a key role to play in advancing progressive goals both on and off the shop floor, which is why we support campaigns around high-quality universal childcare; violence against women; racial and environmental justice; and occupational health and safety. The results of this survey show the need to continue to link inequities on the job and at home, and explore creative ways to address them.

Thank you to all the Steelworkers who responded to the survey, to the activists and staff who helped spread the word and encourage members to fill it out, and to the staff who helped design the survey and analyze its results.

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throughout this report we often refer to “men” and “women,” although we do not mean to erase the experiences of people whose gender identities may not fit into those categories.

## **Background on the Survey and Goals of the Report**

At the end of March 2021, the USW Canadian National Office launched a national online survey asking members of all genders about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. The USW National Women's Committee initiated the survey, out of concern about the impact of the pandemic on women's capacity to take on union leadership roles. By mid-2020, research was showing a steep decline in access to childcare, the beginnings of a "she-cession" and the possibility of a second pandemic of mental health injuries. It was also the summer of George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer – one of many murders of racialized people by police – as well as other forms of racism related to the pandemic. Members of the National Women's Committee wanted to learn about the impact of these events on members as a way of guiding our work.

465 Canadian Steelworkers responded to the survey. We asked members to share some information that the union generally doesn't gather. In addition to telling us where they live and what industry they work in, folks were asked to share their gender, whether they identify as a racialized or Indigenous person, how old they are, their sexual orientation, their family status and whether they are a worker with a disability. Gathering this information allows us to look at the impact of COVID-19 (and other issues) from an equity perspective.

There were responses from most provinces and territories, except for PEI, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. Nearly two-thirds of the responses came from Ontario. The largest group of respondents work in the education sector (just over 40%) but there were responses from many other sectors as well, including large numbers from the telecommunications, manufacturing, healthcare and labour union sectors. About two-thirds of the people who filled out the survey identify as women.

An initial presentation of the survey results was done at an online 'Solidarity in Hard Times' conference in November 2021. The National Women's Committee then met on March 10 and 11, 2022 to review and analyze the results of the survey and to develop recommendations for steps the USW can take to address the issues that the report highlights.

The survey and recommendations will also be presented to the Canadian directors, the staff at the Canadian National Office, servicing staff, the National Health and Safety Committee, the National Aboriginal Committee, and the National Anti-Racism Working Group.

## SECTION 1: The Impact of the Pandemic on Paid Work

The survey asked Steelworkers whether they had been laid off at any time during the pandemic and whether this had affected their union involvement. It also aimed to track whether Steelworkers who had not been laid off were working remotely. 34 of 465 respondents had been laid off at some point during the pandemic, representing just over 7% of the members who responded to the survey. Of those 34, 22 (or just under 65%) had returned to work by the time they took the survey. Union involvement among laid-off workers was evenly split, with 47% having participated in union work or activities during their layoff and 53% not.

During the pandemic, over three-quarters of the respondents to the survey worked from home at some point. At the time that they filled out the survey, nearly 60% were working completely from home.

<b>Currently, which of the following best describes <u>where</u> your work time is spent?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
All hours worked from home	59%
All hours worked at my workplace	27%
Partially from home and partially at my workplace	14%

Steelworkers were asked to compare the amount of time they spent on job-related activities before and during the pandemic. For the most part, respondents were working about the same amount of time at their jobs, although over a third said they were working somewhat or much more. Very few respondents were working less. Not surprisingly, people were doing a lot less commuting given that so many were working from home. Nearly 60% of respondents said that they were commuting somewhat or much less.

### **Working at your regular job:**

<b>Much more</b>	<b>Somewhat more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat less</b>	<b>Much less</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
14%	24%	52%	5%	2%	3%

## **SECTION 2: The Impact of the Pandemic on Childcare**

Nearly two-thirds of the Steelworkers surveyed are married or in a common-law relationship. Between 41% and 48% of respondents live with their children. Just over one third of the respondents to the survey have children under 17 years old (in all cases below, “children” means “children under 17”).

Of those respondents with children, over 80% reported that their children were in school prior to the pandemic. About equal numbers were studying online only, studying partially online and partially in person, and studying only in person at school. A small minority were studying at home in a pod. This may reflect parent preference but also may reflect regional and provincial differences both in the spread of the pandemic and in provincial/regional policies. Importantly, this question only captured a snapshot at the time the member filled out the survey, so it may not reflect the whole of the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, about half of the respondents with children used some kind of childcare service. Of those who did, nearly 70% had their child or children in a daycare centre. There was a change during the pandemic, as nearly three quarters of those with children said they were “currently” not using a childcare service. Over 60% of those respondents said that they did not have continuous access to childcare during the pandemic. Because we know that most members who filled out the survey were not laid off, we can assume that most members with young children were balancing childcare and paid work at the same time. Some of the next survey results explore how that was managed.

Because we asked questions about respondents’ gender and identification with other equity-seeking groups, we can look at the breakdown of childcare (and other types of caring and unpaid labour within the household) through an equity lens. For example, nearly 14% of women with children said they were caring full-time for their children, but less than 3% of men with children said they were doing the same. Looked at in another way, less than 1% of women said that their partner was caring for the children full-time, while over 23% of men said that their partner was doing so. Interestingly, a slightly larger group of both men and women (just over 28% and 26% respectively) said that they were sharing childcare responsibilities with their partner. In the responses, we can certainly see the gender division in terms of who had to balance working with childcare. Over 25% of women with children said that they were either caring for children while they were working or working while their children slept. Less than 8% of men said the same thing.

These findings confirm some of what we know about the division of childcare responsibilities within the household in our society. But it’s important to consider the many reasons that childcare may be divided in this way, including:

- Preconceived notions about who should care for children
- Preconceived notions about whose work is a priority
- The greater or lesser “flexibility” of different types of work
- The gendered differences in who is laid off and who can work from home (i.e. who is there to physically care for children)

**To recap the gender breakdown (only including those with children under 17)**

**Women only:**

<b>How childcare in the home is managed during pandemic</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
I care for the children full time	14%
My partner cares for the children full time	1%
We share childcare responsibilities	25%
I care for the children while working	23%
I work while the children are sleeping	2%
Older siblings look after younger siblings	3%
Someone else cares for the children while I work	4%
The children look after themselves while I work	23%
Other/combination	5%

**Men only:**

<b>How childcare in the home is managed during pandemic</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
I care for the children full time	3%
My partner cares for the children full time	23%
We share childcare responsibilities	28%
I care for the children while working	5%
I work while the children are sleeping	3%
Older siblings look after younger siblings	3%
Someone else cares for the children while I work	15%
The children look after themselves while I work	21%
Other/combination	0%

**Recommendations:**

The USW National Women’s Committee expresses its concern about the loss, to units and locals, of the contribution of parents and family care-givers (mainly women)



because of the workload added by the pandemic. And we encourage other USW leaders and publications to voice this concern in order to rebuild and encourage more women's leadership in our union.

We also recommend that the USW respond to this challenge through collective bargaining by:

- Bargaining flexible work arrangements so that parents can adapt their work hours to attend to family needs
- Developing bargaining guidelines or policies on issues such as a minimum number of paid sick days and their use for family care/emergencies; redressing women workers' loss of seniority, pensions, and benefits eligibility due to leaves or deferred recall taken during the pandemic
- Assessing all bargaining demands (of the local and of the employer) based on whether they negatively impact women workers as a group

We also recommend that the USW respond through education by:

- Including content in Top Officers and Officers in Action courses on planning events so that starting and ending times permit women and all parents/care-givers to take part and on how virtual and hybrid events can remove barriers to members' participation

We also recommend that the USW respond through our own internal structures and policies by:

- Planning union events so that starting and ending times permit women and all parents/care-givers to take part
- Allowing members to take part in union events by virtual means as well as in-person
- Including on the agenda of the 2023 National Policy Conference a plenary session on women's economic security/independence, hosted by the national committee
- Circulating convention and policy conference resolutions on:
  - The minimum number of paid sick days and their use for family care/emergencies
  - Redressing women workers' loss of seniority, pensions, and benefits eligibility due to leaves or deferred recall taken during the pandemic
  - Pay equity
  - Increasing respect for women's careers and economic security/independence

## SECTION 3: Unpaid Work in the Home

Beyond childcare, the data collected in our survey allows us to explore the distribution of many kinds of unpaid work within the home. We looked at who does this work and how the work itself has changed over the course of the pandemic.

For the purpose of this report, we divide unpaid work within the house into three groups:

1. Cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning, and laundry
2. Yard work and home repair
3. Child-related work (helping children with school work, leisure time with children, other child-related responsibilities)

### Cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning and laundry

Gender	% “mostly me” prior to pandemic	% “mostly me” during pandemic	% change
Women	50%	51%	3% increase
Men	19%	26%	32% increase
Non-binary	25%	25%	No change
Prefer not to say	28%	31%	10% increase

Gender	% “about 50/50” prior to pandemic	% “about 50/50” during pandemic	% change
Women	36%	31%	13% decrease
Men	40%	35%	12% decrease
Non-binary	63%	75%	20% increase
Prefer not to say	53%	47%	11% decrease

### Yard work and home repair

Gender	% “mostly me” prior to pandemic	% “mostly me” during pandemic	% change
Women	14%	16%	14% increase
Men	70%	69%	2% decrease
Non-binary	0%	0%	No change
Prefer not to say	11%	11%	No change

Gender	% “about 50/50” prior to pandemic	% “about 50/50” during pandemic	% change
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Women	25%	23%	8% decrease
Men	13%	15%	15% increase
Non-binary	75%	75%	No change
Prefer not to say	56%	56%	No change

**Child-related work (helping children with school work, leisure time with children, taking care of children’s other needs)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>% “mostly me” prior to pandemic</b>	<b>% “mostly me” during pandemic</b>	<b>% change</b>
Women	17%	16%	5% decrease
Men	8%	4%	5% decrease
Non-binary	0%	0%	No change
Prefer not to say	4%	4%	No change

<b>Gender</b>	<b>% “about 50/50” prior to pandemic</b>	<b>% “about 50/50” during pandemic</b>	<b>% change</b>
Women	21%	20%	6% decrease
Men	24%	18%	25% decrease
Non-binary	50%	50%	No change
Prefer not to say	15%	15%	No change

There was not a big change during the pandemic in how household tasks were shared, despite the fact that many people were working from home. Tasks which, prior to the pandemic, fell primarily on women’s shoulders, including cooking, cleaning, laundry and grocery shopping, continued to be their responsibility. In fact, over the course of the pandemic, more than half of women respondents were now primarily responsible for these tasks, and both men and women confirmed that there was a decline in equal sharing of these tasks within the household.

Looking at more traditionally “male” responsibilities, including yard work and home repair, a similar pattern emerges: very little change in how these tasks are shared.

One important exception to this trend has to do with child-related tasks. The equal distribution of these responsibilities between men and women decreased during the pandemic. Many fewer men reported shouldering the primary responsibility for these tasks, but not because the tasks were being more equally shared. There was a more than 25% decrease in the number of men who reported that these tasks were equally shared with their partners. Women also reported a decrease. This mirrors what survey respondents reported about the sharing of childcare during working hours.

## Intensification of unpaid work

Members were asked, compared to before the pandemic, how much time they were now spending on household tasks. The survey results show that household work, on the whole, has intensified (i.e., requires more of their time), especially for women, and especially when it comes to childcare.

### Cooking and meal prep:

	<b>Somewhat or much more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat or much less</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
Total respondents	46%	45%	7%	2%
Women only	49%	42%	7%	1%
Men only	41%	51%	6%	2%
Non-binary folks only	20%	40%	20%	20%

### Cleaning:

	<b>Somewhat or much more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat or much less</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
Total respondents	40%	53%	7%	0%
Women only	46%	46%	8%	0%
Men only	24%	70%	5%	1%
Non-binary folks only	40%	60%	0%	0%

### Childcare\*:

\*Note that we have not included responses here from those who wrote “not applicable” – we are only including responses from those who have childcare responsibilities.

	<b>Somewhat or much more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat or much less</b>
All respondents	52%	32%	2%
Women only	64%	24%	12%
Men only	22%	56%	22%
Non-binary folks only	0%	100%	0%

## Recommendations

The USW National Women's Committee wants the issue of women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work to be part of more union discussions, including discussions about priorities for collective bargaining.

We also recommend that the USW respond by adopting a strategic approach to improving the standard of living in female-majority industries and workplaces that includes:

- Allocating resources to support bargaining and increase union power in non-traditional USW sectors
- Engaging in campaigns to end mandatory arbitration in health care in order to allow for better gains for this female-majority sector

We also recommend that the USW respond through education by:

- Continuing to include content from the Bargaining Equality module in our main course, Bargaining to Win
- Offering Bargaining Equality as a workshop at conferences
- Adapting Bargaining Equality for staff-rep training to help them view their work through a full equity lens
- Adding Bargaining Equality to Top Officers and Officers in Action courses, particularly as it relates to planning union events in ways that accommodate family life, including childless family life

We also recommend that the USW respond through our own internal structures and policies by taking all possible steps to ensure that union life takes family life into account, especially as this may be one way to address what appears to be member apathy.

## SECTION 4: Union Activity During the Pandemic

One of the key questions that the National Women’s Committee had was whether the pandemic was impairing women’s involvement in our union. Members were asked how much time, compared to before the pandemic, they were spending on union activities.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Somewhat or much more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat or much less</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
Attending union meetings/events	13%	32%	33%	23%
Committee member-related duties	10%	21%	18%	51%
Steward-related duties	11%	16%	10%	64%
Local Union Officer-related duties	10%	14%	11%	64%
Talking about the union to co-workers, friends, family	22%	31%	26%	21%

There is not a clear trend here. For those who are involved in elected roles, work seems to have continued unchanged. The biggest decrease was in attending union meetings/events, perhaps because fewer meetings and events were held during the pandemic. It’s important to note that most women (nearly 75%) answered “not applicable” to most of these questions, meaning they don’t hold these positions.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Much more or somewhat more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat less or much less</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
Women	6%	10%	11%	73%
Men	21%	24%	14%	41%
Non-binary workers	0%	20%	0%	80%
Racialized workers	1%	10%	12%	77%
Indigenous workers	8%	25%	33%	33%
Workers with a disability	5%	11%	19%	65%
Workers with children under 17	11%	15%	13%	61%

Members were asked, compared to their plans before the pandemic, how likely they were to run for an elected position in their local. The pandemic does not seem to have affected the likelihood of respondents running for elected office (bearing in mind that a large number aren’t interested in doing so regardless).

<b>Group</b>	<b>More likely</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Less likely</b>	<b>Not at all interested</b>
All respondents	7%	34%	9%	50%
Women	7%	31%	7%	55%
Men	7%	40%	13%	40%
Non-binary workers	0%	40%	20%	40%
Racialized workers	5%	28%	11%	56%
Indigenous workers	8%	33%	25%	33%
Workers with a disability	16%	16%	11%	57%
Workers with children under 17	5%	39%	11%	45%

**Recommendations:**

While the USW National Women’s Committee was relieved that there hadn’t been a greater negative impact on women running for office, it was very concerned to see that most women respondents (73%) were not interested in running for elected office at all.

We also recommend that the USW respond through our own internal structures and policies by:

- Engaging in a thorough campaign to encourage women to run for office at all levels of our union
- Taking all possible steps to put family life at the centre of how we conceive of union engagement, in order to increase participation and decrease apathy (which may be related to the inaccessibility of union events).
- Encouraging local unions to add child/family care expense coverage in their bylaws, including by sharing existing examples of local bylaws so other locals have ideas to draw on and by widely disseminating information about the USW Family & Community Education Fund family-care reimbursement program
- Encouraging local unions to allow members to attend some or all membership meetings by Zoom

We also recommend that the USW respond through research and data management by:

- Collecting and analyzing data about the demographics of local union officers and members in Canada on an annual and ongoing basis
- Commissioning professional opinion surveys of members to learn more about what they think on a variety of issues

## SECTION 5: Impact of the Pandemic on Mental Health and Relationships

One area of grave concern that comes out of this survey is the impact of the pandemic on Steelworkers' mental health. Members were asked to rate the following elements compared to before the pandemic, and the results below show how overall mental health has seriously deteriorated.

	<b>Much better</b>	<b>Somewhat better</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat worse</b>	<b>Much worse</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
Your stress level	4%	6%	19%	40%	31%	0%
Your overall mental health	4%	5%	20%	44%	27%	0%
Your relationship with your partner	5%	15%	39%	13%	5%	23%
Your relationship with your children	3%	13%	35%	6%	1%	42%

Steelworkers from all equity groups overwhelmingly reported a steep decline compared to before the pandemic.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Much better or somewhat better</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Somewhat worse or much worse</b>
Women	11%	19%	70%
Men	5%	24%	71%
Non-binary workers	0%	20%	80%
Racialized workers	15%	20%	65%
Indigenous workers	8%	25%	67%
Workers with a disability	19%	14%	68%
Workers with children under 17	6%	17%	76%



## Member Comments – Mental Health

Hundreds of members added their own comments when asked about the mental health impact of the pandemic. This selection of (anonymous) comments reflects the concerns that members shared. The comments have been edited for length and clarity.

*“Anxiety, depression, isolation, longing for social interaction, loss of treasured activities, stress about family members' health, anger towards others' behaviour/decisions, frustration, helplessness, apathy.”*

*“No boundaries between work and personal life; feelings of isolation; increased anxiety and feelings of despair; increased anxiety attacks; loss of sleep, appetite, causing deterioration in physical health.”*

*“I have been overwhelmed with trying to keep up with work requirements and taking care of my young child who has ADHD. There were accommodations made to my schedule for 2 months only. Otherwise, I am expected to working my usual schedule while taking care of my child. My employer monitors my activity on Microsoft Teams and I am made to feel not good enough if I take time to help my child with their online school. It has been impossible. I am constantly losing sleep over work concerns.”*

*“I worry about my family's health, about our future, about job security, about money. Pre-existing panic attacks have increased significantly in frequency and intensity. Feelings of burnout and exhaustion. I have three children under 7 years old. During the pandemic, there were months upon months with no childcare at all, then lots of flipping back and forth between in-person school and virtual school as provincial laws changed and as COVID cases popped up in my children's classes. There is no understanding among my colleagues or superiors about what trying to work while simultaneously caring for small children is like, and little sympathy for the fact that I do most of my work in the middle of the night to compensate for often being unable to keep up during daytime hours due to childcare responsibilities. As I type this, my entire family is currently in self-isolation due to COVID cases in my children's school, and I'm still working full-time. I'm taking care of the kids all day and working all night.”*

*“I can't see a light at the end of the tunnel.”*

*“I lost two close family members. Both live outside the country. This has taken a huge toll on my mental health. I can't seem to get over my loss and pull myself out of this dark place. I feel weak and alone. I don't know what to do. I live in a constant fear of losing my job, which is terrifying for a single mother. I had lots of ambition and goals, and wanted to progress in my career, but all of this has set me way back. I feel that I'm so far from where I was before the pandemic.”*

*“Working in a Health and Safety role, my work demands have increased exponentially. This increased demand without recognition or compensation makes me feel unappreciated by my employer. I have considered finding work elsewhere.”*

*“I left my job after my boss suggested I get a nanny and also wanted to reduce my contract from FT to PT. Now I work three jobs, all short-term contracts.”*

*“It has been difficult not seeing my family and friends, but working from home has had a positive impact on my mental health. I've regained the time spent commuting and end my day with more energy. I can better align my day with my own working style. Instead of continuing to work during lunch, I can do chores or take a brief rest. I've actually had time to sit and read a book which felt so good!”*

### **Recommendations:**

The USW National Women’s Committee believes that our union needs to take concerted action for better mental health, at all levels of the USW.

We recommend that the USW respond by encouraging local unions to mitigate some pandemic impacts through collective bargaining by:

- Within each district, preparing and circulating model language on: access to paid sick leave; access to short-term disability benefits; the right to disconnect (electronically) from work; and other measures to enhance workplace flexibility, not worker flexibility

We also recommend that the USW respond through political action and community connection by:

- Demanding improved funding for community mental-health groups; better legislation on rent increases, evictions, and general housing justice issues; ending financial precarity by expanding EI eligibility and instituting a guaranteed basic living income; and adoption of a national action plan on violence against women.

We also recommend that the USW respond through education by:

- Offering the workshop “Practical Ways Local Unions Can Support Members' Good Mental Health” more often and at the 2022 national women’s conference
- Posting the workshop tool on the web site and promoting it through social media
- Promoting attendance at USW’s multi-day mental health course
- Encouraging local unions to train women’s/equity advocates, social stewards, and/or labour-community advocates

We also recommend that the USW respond through our own internal structures and policies by:

- Creating a web page with comprehensive listing of community resources related to mental well-being, and connect this to the work of stewards

## SECTION 6: Racial Justice During the Pandemic

During the pandemic, events such as George Floyd’s murder, the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Pacquet and Joyce Echaquan, and conflicts affecting Wet’suwet’en, Six Nations of the Grand River and Sipekne’katic highlighted the fight for racial justice. Most recently, we can add the trauma of the recovery of the remains of thousands of Indigenous children at the sites of former residential “schools.” The survey asked about the impact these events may have had on Steelworkers’ paid work, union involvement, mental health, and relations with family and friends.

Respondents did not, on the whole, report much of an impact on their paid work. However, over half reported some or significant impact on their mental health, and a large minority reported an impact on their relations with family and friends. Looking at different subgroups, over 50% of all respondents in every group reported an impact on their mental health. The groups that reported the greatest impact were workers who identified as having a disability (84% reported an impact on their mental health); racialized workers (70%); and women (69%).

Most respondents did not report these events as having impacted their ability to take on paid work or union work.

	<b>Significant impact</b>	<b>Some impact</b>	<b>No impact</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>
Your paid work	5%	15%	73%	6%
Your ability to take on paid work	2%	6%	85%	7%
Your ability to take on union work	4%	8%	80%	8%
Your mental health	16%	48%	31%	5%
Relations with family and friends	9%	30%	55%	5%

## Member Comments – Racial Justice

Dozens of members added their own comments when asked about the impact of the pandemic as it relates to racism and racial justice. This selection of (anonymous) comments reflects the concerns that members shared. The comments have been edited for length and clarity.

*“I stress about the injustices that other people are facing and how those are exacerbated by COVID. Without being able to spend quality time with my family and friends, I feel as though I can't talk to them about it because there isn't the same depth in the relationships over the phone that could allow us to really get into it in a meaningful way if they disagree with me. So I don't try to help them understand my point of view because I don't want the rift that COVID has caused to grow even bigger.”*

*“I no longer feel the need to socialize. I actually prefer to be alone, I dread phone calls or appointments. I'm always negative. I'm Asian and with all the Asian hate going around I feel super uncomfortable and like a walking target.”*

*“Guilt for having a privileged life while others are suffering. Not knowing how to take action to be an ally.”*

*“Pandemic stress without factoring in racism has been largely logistical for me (dropping off groceries, etc.) which I can handle because I'm lucky to be working from home, with no drop in income. But the racism fueled by the pandemic is way more emotionally taxing. The first person in my life affected by COVID was a Filipina PSW (employer did NOT protect her, it spread to her family and her spouse died). Why this happened to her and not to me is all about race, class, privilege, it kills me, I can't get over it. Then to see no lessons learned, the same people being put in harm's way, it's really demoralizing.”*

*“The events mentioned above have definitely weighed on me as a racialized female in a largely white work environment. I think about racial justice at work and the lack of representation which makes it feel more and more difficult to work at my job since I work for an institution with lots of systemic issues. At the same time, the events have made me take more active interest and involvement in the union to try to make change. I do think that my mental health has been impacted by events around racial/social justice because although there are many people fighting for change, I still feel powerless and am unclear about how I can really as an individual make change, particularly in my workplace.”*

*“I was glad all this was being brought into focus, because it has needed to for a long time, but it has also made me worry more about the safety of my partner (who is black) and our future mixed-race kids. It kind of just felt, sometimes, like the whole world was just totally irreversibly fucked.”*

*“These events have led me to further reflection on my personal privilege. I have taken on further reading, activism and interest in anti-racism, understanding white privilege. I am prioritizing attending online events, workshops on anti-racism.”*

*“It is hard emotionally to see my employer produce commitment statements but then take no action and make no changes. The hypocrisy is draining.”*

## **Recommendations:**

The USW National Women’s Committee believes that this was the first USW survey to ask members a substantive question about race and racial justice issues. And we recognize that the pandemic had a disproportionately greater impact on racialized workers, who tend to be concentrated in health-care and caring work.

We recommend that our union respond through research, political action, and collective bargaining by:

- Conducting further research into the intersection between race and work issues, on a regular basis
- Allocating resources to support bargaining and increase union power in non-traditional USW sectors
- Engaging in campaigns to end mandatory arbitration in health care in order to allow for better gains for this female-majority sector
- Lobbying for structural and legal change in the long-term care sector and for the (re)election of politicians who commit to reforms
- Increasing USW’s outspokenness on racial justice issues and basing support of politicians on their record of anti-racism action

We also recommend that the USW respond through education by:

- Expanding and promoting anti-racism education for members and staff

We also recommend that the USW respond through collective bargaining by:

- Within each district, preparing and circulating model language on bereavement leave which
  - Defines “immediate” family members as the worker themselves defines them
  - Does not require leave days be taken consecutively with the last day being the day of the funeral, since this does not accommodate practices in all faith traditions
  - Does not make leave conditional on attendance at funerals, as many members (in particular, newer Canadians) have family overseas and cannot afford the cost or time to travel, but do not grieve any less

## **Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations**

### **Section 2:**

#### General Recommendations:

- Express concern, in speeches and USW publications, about the loss to units and locals of the contribution of parents and family care-givers (mainly women) because of the workload added by the pandemic, in order to rebuild and encourage more women's leadership in our union

#### Collective Bargaining Recommendations:

- Bargain flexible work arrangements so that parents can adapt their work hours to attend to family needs;
- Develop bargaining guidelines or policies on issues such as a minimum number of paid sick days and their use for family care/emergencies; redressing women workers' loss of seniority, pensions, and benefits eligibility due to leaves or deferred recall taken during the pandemic
- Assess all bargaining demands (of the local and of the employer) based on whether they negatively impact women workers as a group

#### Education Recommendations:

- Include content in Top Officers and Officers in Action courses on planning events so that starting and ending times permit women and all parents/care-givers to take part and on how virtual and hybrid events can remove barriers to members' participation

#### Internal Structure and Policy Recommendations:

- Plan union events so that starting and ending times permit women and all parents/care-givers to take part
- Allow members to take part in union events by virtual means as well as in-person
- Include on the agenda of the 2023 National Policy Conference a plenary session on women's economic security/independence, hosted by the national committee
- Circulate convention and policy conference resolutions on:
  - The minimum number of paid sick days and their use for family care/emergencies
  - Redressing women workers' loss of seniority, pensions, and benefits eligibility due to leaves or deferred recall taken during the pandemic
  - Pay equity
  - Increasing respect for women's careers and economic security/independence

### **Section 3:**

#### General Recommendation:

- Make the issue of women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work part of more union discussions, including discussions about priorities for collective bargaining

#### Strategic Recommendations:

- Allocate resources to support bargaining and increase union power in non-traditional USW sectors
- Engage in campaigns to end mandatory arbitration in health care in order to allow for better gains for this female-majority sector

#### Education Recommendations:

- Continue to include content from the Bargaining Equality module in our main course, Bargaining to Win
- Offer Bargaining Equality as a workshop at conferences
- Adapt Bargaining Equality for staff-rep training to help them view their work through a full equity lens
- Add Bargaining Equality to Top Officers and Officers in Action courses, particularly as it relates to planning union events in ways that accommodate family life, including childless family life

#### Internal Structure and Policy Recommendations:

- Through our own internal structures and policies, take all possible steps to ensure that union life takes family life into account, especially as this may be one way to address what appears to be member apathy

### **Section 4:**

#### Internal Structure and Policy Recommendations:

- Engage in a thorough campaign to encourage women to run for office at all levels of our union
- Take all possible steps to put family life at the centre of how we conceive of union engagement, in order to increase participation and decrease apathy (which may be related to the inaccessibility of union events).
- Encourage local unions to add child/family care expense coverage in their bylaws, including by sharing existing examples of local bylaws so other locals have ideas to draw on and by widely disseminating information about the USW Family & Community Education Fund family-care reimbursement program



- Encourage local unions to allow members to attend some or all membership meetings by Zoom

#### Research and Data Management Recommendations:

- Collect and analyze data about the demographics of local union officers and members in Canada on an annual and ongoing basis
- Commission professional opinion surveys of members to learn more about what they think on a variety of issues

### **Section 5:**

#### General Recommendations:

- At all levels of the USW, take concerted action for better mental health

#### Collective Bargaining Recommendations:

- Within each district, prepare and circulate model language on: access to paid sick leave; access to short-term disability benefits; the right to disconnect (electronically) from work; and other measures to enhance workplace flexibility, not worker flexibility

#### Political Action and Community Connection Recommendations:

- Demand improved funding for community mental-health groups; better legislation on rent increases, evictions, and general housing justice issues; ending financial precarity by expanding EI eligibility and instituting a guaranteed basic living income; and adoption of a national action plan on violence against women.

#### Education Recommendations:

- Offer the workshop “Practical Ways Local Unions Can Support Members' Good Mental Health” more often and at the 2022 national women’s conference
- Post the workshop tool on the web site and promoting it through social media
- Promote attendance at USW’s multi-day mental health course
- Encourage local unions to train women’s/equity advocates, social stewards, and/or labour-community advocates

#### Internal Structure and Policy Recommendations:

- Create a web page with comprehensive listing of community resources related to mental well-being, and connect this to the work of stewards

### **Section 6:**

#### Research, Political Action, and Collective Bargaining Recommendations:

- Conduct further research into the intersection between race and work issues, on a regular basis
- Allocate resources to support bargaining and increase union power in non-traditional USW sectors
- Engage in campaigns to end mandatory arbitration in health care in order to allow for better gains for this female-majority sector
- Lobby for structural and legal change in the long-term care sector and for the (re)election of politicians who commit to reforms
- Increase USW's outspokenness on racial justice issues and basing support of politicians on their record of anti-racism action

#### Education Recommendations:

- Expand and promote anti-racism education for members and staff

#### Collective Bargaining Recommendations:

- Within each district, prepare and circulate model language on bereavement leave which
  - Defines "immediate" family members as the worker themselves defines them
  - Does not require leave days be taken consecutively with the last day being the day of the funeral, since this does not accommodate practices in all faith traditions
  - Does not make leave conditional on attendance at funerals, as many members (in particular, newer Canadians) have family overseas and cannot afford the cost or time to travel, but do not grieve any less

## Appendix 2: Participation in the Survey

465 Steelworkers responded to the survey. In July 2021, the total Canadian USW membership was 154,804. We gathered the following (anonymous) information about the members who responded to the survey:

1. Province of residence
2. Industry
3. Gender
4. Race
5. Age
6. Marital status
7. Parental status
8. Sexual orientation
9. Whether they have a disability

### **Province of Residence**

Province/Territory	# survey respondents	% survey respondents	# union members (2021 estimate)	% union members (2021 estimate)
Newfoundland	1	0%	3,300	2%
Nova Scotia	1	0%	640	0%
PEI	0	0%	29	0%
New Brunswick	1	0%	679	0%
Quebec	31	7%	49,518	32%
Ontario	297	64%	64,906	42%
Manitoba	9	2%	5,649	4%
Saskatchewan	15	3%	4,463	3%
Alberta	34	7%	5,605	4%
British Columbia	74	16%	19,513	13%
Yukon	0	0%	33	0%
North West Territories	0	0%	496	0%
Nunavut	2	0%	0	0%

Overall, the survey is fairly reflective of where Steelworkers live and work. The biggest gap is the low response rate from members in Quebec. Almost 32% of USW members live in Quebec, but less than 7% of those who filled out the survey live in Quebec. Ontario is overrepresented, comprising nearly 66% of the survey’s respondents but having 42% of Canadian USW members.

One note: Two people who filled out the survey told us that they live in Nunavut, but we don’t represent any members in Nunavut. Perhaps they had returned home after being laid off work, or they may regularly travel from one province/territory to another for work.

**What industry do you work in?**

In the survey, respondents could choose from a number of industries or “other,” where they could write in their industry. By far, the broad “education” sector had the greatest number of respondents, at over 41% of respondents. A large group also came from the telecommunications sector (23%).

Industry	# survey respondents	% survey respondents
Mining	14	3%
Forestry	7	2%
Telecommunications	105	23%
Education	191	41%
Security	7	2%
Healthcare	31	7%
Transportation	8	2%
Manufacturing	44	9%
Accommodation/Food Services	8	2%
Finance	8	2%
Labour Union	33	7%
Other*	9	2%

\* “Other” industries included: Social Services; Food Safety; Nuclear; Government; Real estate; Recreation; Retail. There were 3 or fewer respondents from each of these industries.

The breakdown of the survey respondents by industry is not very reflective of our membership by industry. For example, 41% of the Steelworkers who filled out the survey work in the education sector. However, among our membership as a whole, just over 7% work in that sector. And in the survey, some sectors are underrepresented. For example, just under 9.5% of those members who completed the survey work in the manufacturing sector, while over 38% of union members work in that sector.

## **Gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability**

The survey asked Steelworkers to share their gender, whether they identify as a racialized or an Indigenous person, how old they are (their year of birth), their sexual orientation, their family status, and whether they are a worker with a disability. As with the entire survey, these responses were anonymous.

Looking at the impact of Covid-19 (or indeed many issues) from an equity perspective helps us to see how the same circumstances or policies can and do impact members of our union in different ways.

### **Here is the breakdown of the survey respondents:**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Women	66%
Men	29%
Non-binary/third gender	10%
Two Spirit	0%
Prefer not to say	3%

<b>Do you identify as transgender?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes	1%
No	96%
Prefer not to say	2%

<b>Do you identify as a racialized worker?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes	17%
No	83%

<b>Do you identify as an Indigenous worker?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes	3%
No	97%

<b>Do you identify as a LGBTQ2SIA+ worker?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes	9%
No	91%

<b>Do you identify as a worker with a disability?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes	8%
No	92%

<b>What year were you born?</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Before 1960	7%
1960-1969	23%
1970-1979	31%
1980-1989	30%
1990-1999	9%
2000 and after	0%

## Appendix 2: Survey

### Section 1: Paid work

#### A) Where you work:

1. What province do you work in?
2. What industry do you work in?

Manufacturing

Mining

Telecommunications

Education

Security

Health care

Transportation

Forestry

Other: please specify

#### B) Paid work and the pandemic

1. Were you laid off during the pandemic?

Yes

No [skip to question 3]

2. If yes, have you been recalled to work?

Yes

No

3. Did your regular hours of work change during the pandemic??

More hours

Fewer hours

No impact

4. Are you considered an essential worker? (NOTE: an essential worker is anyone whose place of work was legally required to remain open during the pandemic.)

Yes

No

5. Did you work from home at any point during the pandemic?

Yes

No

6. Are you currently working from home?

Yes

No

I work partially from home and partially from an office/work site

## Section 2: Home and children

1. What is your current marital status?

Single/never married

Married/Common law

In committed relationship, but not living together

Separated/Divorced

Widowed

2. A) Including yourself, how many people live in your household:

If 1, please skip to Section 3]

B) If more than 1, please check the box that best describes who you live with:

I live with a partner only

I live with my partner and child/children

I live with my child/children only

I live with family members from multiple generations

I live with other family members not of multiple generations (e.g. siblings)

I live with roommates/friends

3. Do you have children 17 years old or younger living with you?

No [skip to Section 3]

Yes

How many [please specify]

What are their ages? [indicate number at each age]

0-2



3-5

6-12

13-17

4. Do the children live with you full-time? (e.g., you have a shared custody arrangement; your children attend post-secondary school and live at home some of the year)

Yes. all children live with me full-time

Yes, some of my children live with me full-time

No, none of my children live with me full-time

5. Before the pandemic, did your children go to primary or secondary school?

Yes

No

6. Are your children currently going to school in person?

Yes

No

They are in online school

We are homeschooling/pod-schooling (shared with other families)

They attend school part-time and online school part-time

7. Before the pandemic, were your children in daycare or cared for by someone other than yourself while you worked in paid employment?

Yes:

Childcare centre (daycare)

Babysitter/nanny

Family member

Other

No

8. Have you had continuous access to childcare throughout the pandemic?

Yes

No

9. While you're at work now, are your children currently in daycare or cared for by someone other than yourself?

Yes

Childcare centre

Babysitter/nanny

Family member

Other

No

10. If No; which of these reasons best describes why you are not using childcare services?

Health concerns

Can no longer afford childcare

Family members or friends are now able to help

I am able to care for my child/ren

The childcare centre closed down/my child no longer has a spot

Other: please specify

11. How are you currently organizing the childcare in your home? (either full-time or when a child is not in school/daycare)

I care for child/ren full time

Spouse/partner cares for child/ren full time

I split looking after child/ren with my spouse/partner (I look after children when spouse is working and vice versa)

I look after child/ren and work at the same time

I work while child/ren are sleeping

Older sibling(s) look after younger sibling(s)

Someone else looks after children while I work

Child/ren look after themselves while I work

Other: please specify

12. Are you responsible for caring for others who live with you in your home? (e.g. a parent or grandparent, dependent adult child)

Yes

No

### Section 3: Unpaid work and leisure

Please indicate whether you are spending more, less or the same amount of time on the following activities, **compared to before the pandemic (the six months between September 2019 and February 2020):**

#### A) Time you spend on household tasks:

1. Employment and related activities **(please answer much more/somewhat more/about the same/somewhat less/much less)**
  - a. Working at your regular job
  - b. Working at a second part-time job
  - c. Looking for a new job
  - d. Commuting
  - e. Taking courses related to your job
  
2. Domestic work for household and family members **[please answer much more/somewhat more/about the same/somewhat less/much less]**
  - a. Cooking and meal prep
  - b. Cleaning
  - c. House repair and upkeep
  - d. Laundry and ironing
  - e. Household management (paying bills, budgeting, planning and scheduling chores)
  - f. Pet care
  - g. Grocery and supply shopping
  
3. Caregiving for household and family members **[please answer much more/somewhat more/about the same/somewhat less/much less]**
  - a. Childcare (helping your children with the tasks of daily living)
  - b. Teaching children
  - c. Caring for dependent adults (helping with daily living)
  - d. Taking family members (including children) to appointments
  
4. Volunteering, socializing, and taking part in the community **[please answer much more/somewhat more/about the same/somewhat less/much less]**
  - a. Union work (such as attending meetings, being a steward, local president or health and safety rep)
  - b. Community volunteering or charity work
  - c. Volunteering to help other households (such as buying groceries or helping with childcare for a friend or neighbour)

- d. Socializing with friends and family
  - e. Participating in community or cultural events
  - f. Participating in union work
  - g. Participating in religious events
5. Culture, leisure, mass media, sports **[please answer much more/somewhat more/about the same/somewhat less/much less]**
- a. Participating in sports
  - b. Attending sporting events
  - c. Participating in hobbies
  - d. TV, internet, radio, reading for leisure
  - e. Relaxing/reflecting
  - f. Self care (personal hygiene and receiving personal care from others, such as hair cuts)
  - g. Sleep

**B) How you share household tasks:**

**If do not live with a spouse or partner, please skip to the next section**

1. Before the pandemic, please describe how the following tasks were split between you and your spouse or partner
- a. Cooking**
    - almost exclusively my partner
    - mostly my partner
    - about fifty-fifty
    - mostly me
    - almost exclusively me
    - exclusively someone else
  - b. Grocery shopping**
    - almost exclusively my partner
    - mostly my partner
    - about fifty-fifty
    - mostly me
    - almost exclusively me
    - exclusively someone else
  - c. Cleaning**
    - almost exclusively my partner
    - mostly my partner
    - about fifty-fifty
    - mostly me
    - almost exclusively me
    - exclusively someone else
  - d. Yard work**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**e. Laundry**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**f. Home repairs**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**g. Paying bills**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**h. Helping children with school work**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**i. Playing with children (leisure)**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**j. Taking care of children's other needs (personal care such as bathing, bed time, etc.)**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**2. During the pandemic (from March 2020 to present), please describe how the following tasks are split between you and your spouse or partner:**

**a. Cooking**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**b. Grocery shopping**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**c. Cleaning**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**d. Yard work**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**e. Laundry**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty

mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**f. Home repairs**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**g. Paying bills**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**h. Helping children with school work**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**i. Playing with children (leisure)**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

**j. Taking care of children's other needs (personal care such as bathing, bed time, etc.)**

almost exclusively my partner  
mostly my partner  
about fifty-fifty  
mostly me  
almost exclusively me  
exclusively someone else

## Section 4: Mental health and social relationships

### 1. Mental health

Compared to pre-pandemic levels, do you consider the following better, worse or about the same?

1. Your stress level
2. Your overall mental health
3. Relationship with your partner (if applicable)
4. Relationship with your children (if applicable)

Are you experiencing any other impacts on your mental health from the pandemic that you wish to describe? (e.g. feelings of isolation from a loss of social or family contacts, etc.)

[open-ended]

### 2. Involvement in our Union

Please check the statement that best describes how the pandemic has affected your involvement in union activities:

I spend more time now attending union meetings or other functions (either online or in person)

I spend less time now attending union meetings or other functions (either online or in person)

I spend more time now on my duties for an elected position (executive, steward, grievance committee, etc.)

I had to give up an elected position (executive, steward, grievance committee, etc.)

My union involvement has remained the same

Has the pandemic had an impact on whether or not you would run for an elected position in your local?

Yes:

More likely to run

Less likely to run

No:

I was not interested in running

I was interested in running and still am



## Section 5: Impact of other major events

[for respondents who earlier identified as racialized or Indigenous]

During the pandemic, major events (such as the killing of George Floyd, the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Pacquet and Joyce Echaquan, and conflicts involving the Wet'suwet'en, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Sipekne'katik nations) have focussed attention on the fight for racial justice.

1. Have these events had an impact on your paid work?
  - Yes [option to elaborate]
  - No, no impact
2. Have these events had an impact on your ability to take in unpaid work?
  - Yes [option to elaborate]
  - No, no impact
3. Have these events had an impact on your ability to get involved in union activities?
  - Yes [option to elaborate]
  - No, no impact
4. Have these events had an impact on your mental health?
  - Yes [option to elaborate]
  - No, no impact
  - Prefer not to answer

## Section 6: Finally, a little bit about you

**1. Year of birth:**

**2. What is your gender:**

Female

Male

Non-binary/third gender

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe:

**3. Do you identify as transgender?**

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

**4. Do you identify as any of the following? (click all that apply)**

Racialized worker

Indigenous worker

LGBTQ2SIA+ worker

Worker with a disability