

Fact Sheet¹

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Women's Unemployment in New Jersey

December 2020



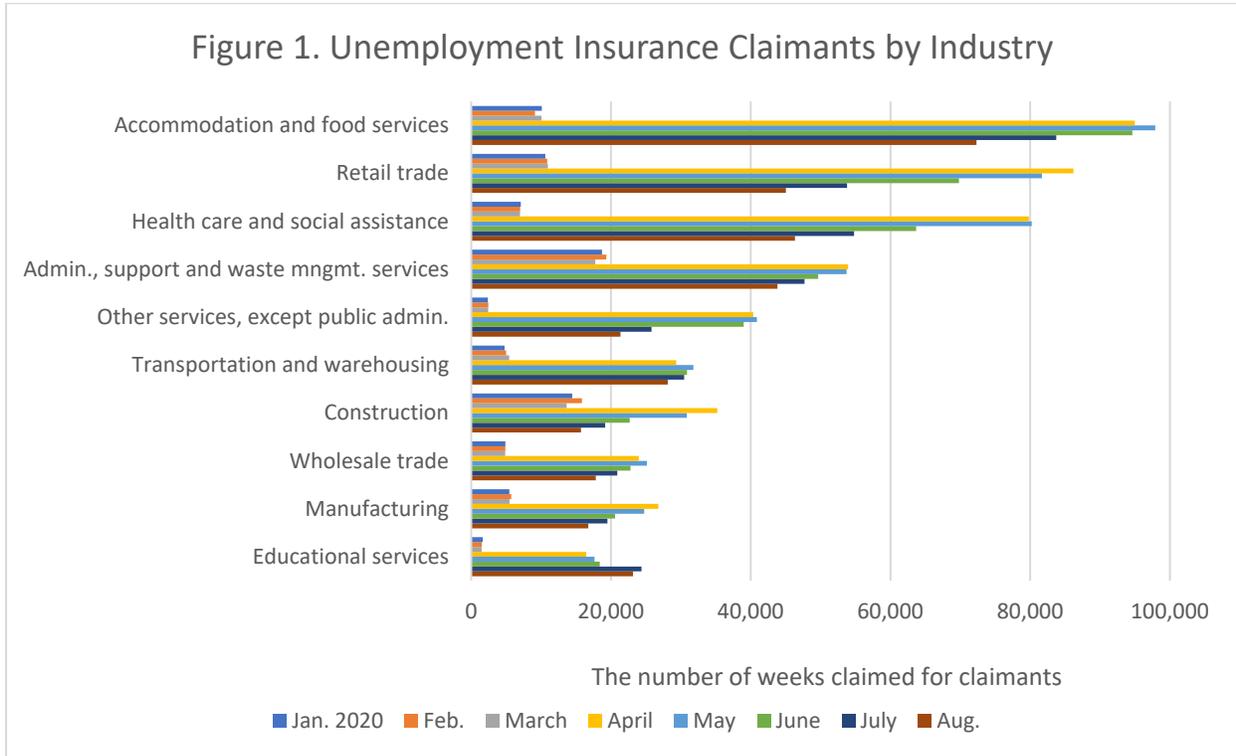
FACT SHEET TAKEAWAY

With surging labor force participation rates for women, by the end of 2019 women held the majority of non-farm jobs in the U.S. Growth in retail, hospitality, education, and healthcare were largely responsible for women's record-level labor force participation. A year later, women are now bearing the brunt of the economic crisis and social upheaval triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Women's work lives have been disrupted in profound ways: they are on the frontlines and in jobs designated as essential workers; they are doing even more unpaid care work at home as a result of child care and demands of K-12 remote and hybrid learning; and many women are experiencing ongoing economic hardship and instability. Across the nation, women's unemployment numbers continue to outpace that of men, and unemployment for Black and Hispanic women continues to outpace that of White women. In addition, over one million women have dropped out of the paid labor force completely.

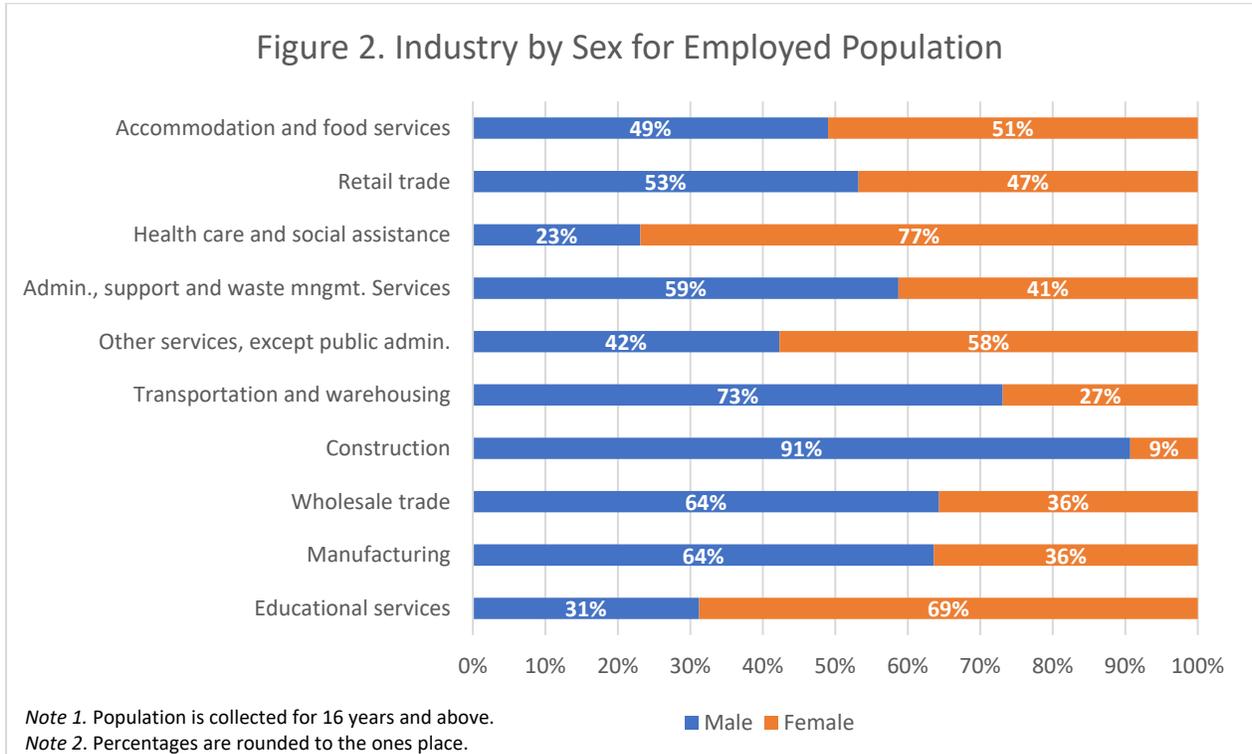
As with the rest of the country, job losses in New Jersey surged starting in April 2020 following a host of business closures and workplace lockdowns during the pandemic, and for the rest of 2020 women have accounted for 55 to 57% of unemployment claims in the state.² Data on unemployment claims by industry and occupation for New Jersey help to explain why women's unemployment numbers have featured so prominently during this crisis and can help inform efforts in the State to provide relief, support, and recovery.

KEY FACTS

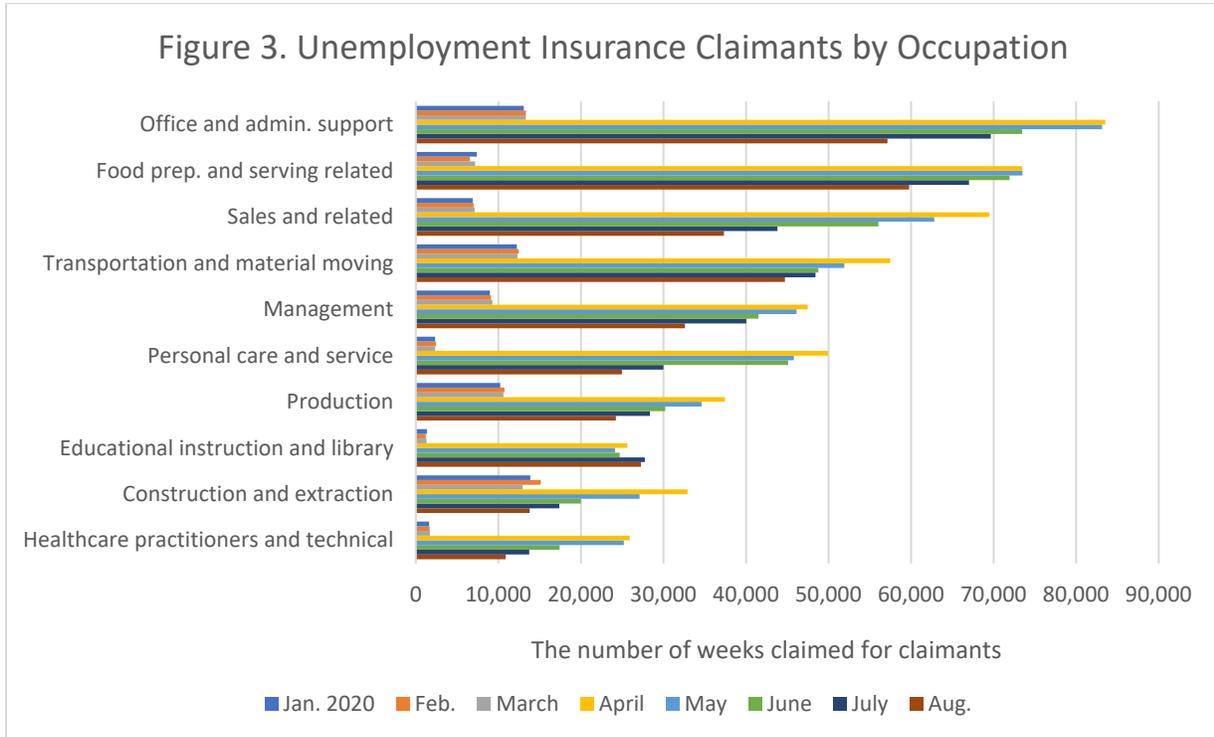
Figure 1 reports the ten industries that experienced the largest numbers of insurance claimants as of August 2020, when women's share of unemployment claims peaked at 57%. Topping the list are the accommodation and food services industry, retail trade, and healthcare and social assistance.



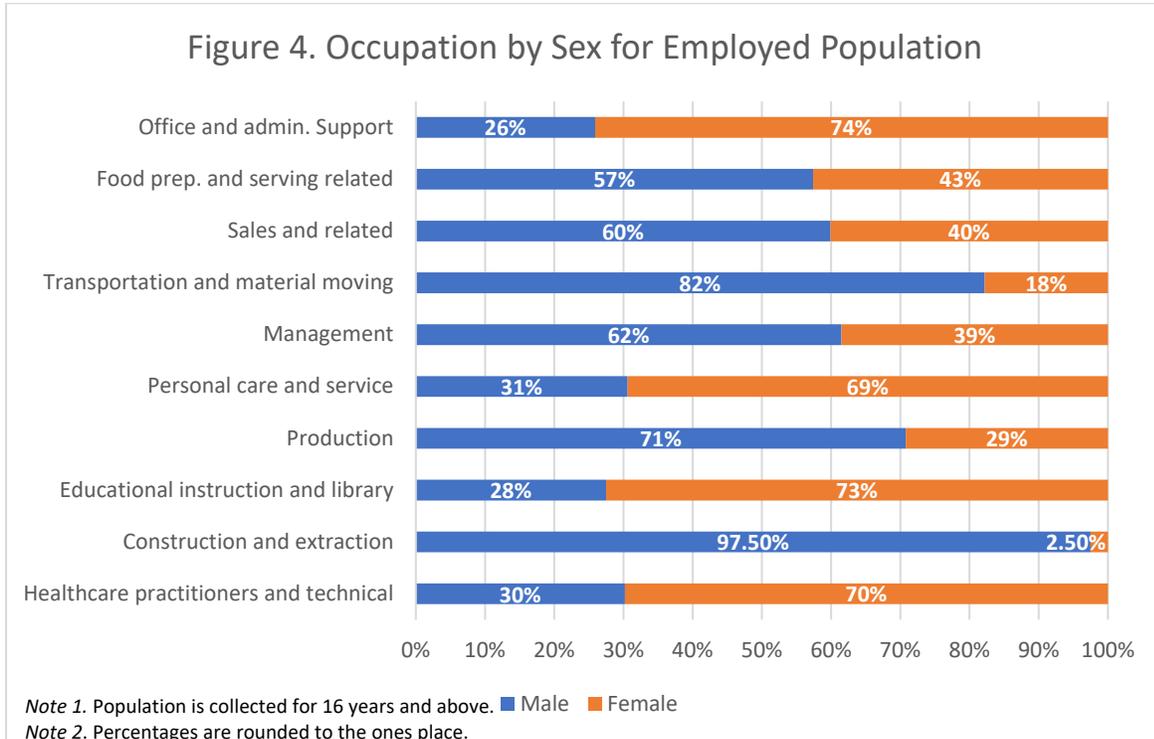
Women are disproportionately represented among workers in these industries with the most unemployment. As shown in Figure 2, women make up 51% of workers in accommodation and food services and 77% of workers in health care and social assistance, two of the top three industries hardest hit by unemployment claims. Not only are women heavily represented among all workers in these industries, but the industries also provide a substantial portion of women’s jobs. In fact, almost one quarter of New Jersey’s women workers are employed in the health care and social assistance industry, which makes it a far more important employer for women than it is for men. These industry shares are based on micro-data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2019, the most recent year for which we can get employment data disaggregated by states.



A similar analysis by occupations in Figure 3 indicates that the top 3 occupations with the most unemployment claimants are office and administrative support workers, food preparation and food service workers, and sales workers. Unemployment claims were particularly heavy in April and May 2020 at the height of the lockdown period.



Three quarters of office and administrative support workers are women, and they are also heavily represented among personal care and service workers, another highly-impacted occupation (Figure 4). Men have a particularly high representation among transportation and material moving³ workers, the job category with the fourth highest number of unemployment insurance claimants. Not only are office and admin support workers primarily female, but this job category is also the source of employment for almost one fifth of New Jersey’s female workforce. Men, in contrast, are not clustered in any particular occupation, and definitely not in an occupation so heavily hit by unemployment claims.



These findings, combined with findings reported for the country as a whole, suggest that the economic stability of New Jersey women and their families has been heavily jeopardized by the pandemic. This is even more true for Latinas and Black women. Relief and recovery efforts need to be designed and implemented to ensure that women do not experience permanent economic damage and setbacks. And recovery efforts that prioritize gender and racial equity will help New Jersey manage better the economic fallout of future crises.

¹ The Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University conducts cutting-edge research relevant to gender and work. For more information about CWW, visit our website at <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/CWW>.

² This statement is based on monthly reports published by the Department of Labor, at <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/chariu.asp>.