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**VICE NEWS****Most Brown and Black Americans Are Exposing Themselves to Coronavirus for a Paycheck**

Among the American workforce, just 16.2% of Hispanic workers and 19.7% of black Americans are able to work from home, while about 30% of whites and 37% of Asian-Americans can.

By [Chris Moody](#)Mar 23 2020, 1:51pm   

Every day, Bettie Douglas, a food service worker at a McDonald's restaurant in St. Louis, makes an agonizing choice: Go in to work and risk exposure to COVID-19, or lose out on a paycheck she needs to support her family.

At 62, Douglas is at high risk if she's diagnosed with the virus. She lives with her brother and her two sons, one who has disabilities. As the sole breadwinner, staying home to avoid the novel coronavirus isn't an option. If there's work available, she'll take it.

"I can't worry and focus on that," she said of the virus. "I can't afford to. I have a family that I have to take care of. I have to focus on my electric not getting cut off. My water not getting cut off. Having food to feed my child and having toiletries that we need."

The restaurant where she works now prohibits dine-in customers in response to the pandemic, so employees work the drive-through and mobile orders, which requires fewer workers. As a result, Douglas' hours have been cut. She hasn't been on the schedule since Tuesday, and she anticipates that she'll only be allowed to work half the hours per day she usually does.

**"Bills are not going to be paid like they're supposed to. I have less to buy food with, so I'm worried about that. I'll probably have to visit pantries."**

"It's been rough," Douglas said. "Bills are not going to be paid like they're supposed to. I have less to buy food with, so I'm worried about that. I'll probably have to visit pantries."

Douglas is one of more than 100 million Americans who must be physically present to work, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Although it might not feel like it from the prominence of online chatter from people working from home, teleworkers are actually in the minority: Less than 30% of Americans have jobs that allow working from home, according to data

from the Bureau of Labor Statistics compiled by the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank in Washington, DC.

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“There’s a privilege to it,” said Elise Gould, a co-author of the report.

“There’s a very different reality that some people face that is somewhat invisible.”

The telework disparity, the researchers found, disproportionately affects black and brown workers, particularly people in low-income work. White and Asian workers have the highest rates of access to remote work, but the rate of telecommuting access plummets among black and brown employees. Among the American workforce, just 16.2% of Hispanic workers and 19.7% of black Americans are able to work from home, while about 30% of whites and 37% of Asian-Americans can.

A majority of Americans — at least those who still have jobs during the pandemic — must weigh whether to go to work and risk being infected by the virus, or forego pay. For those living paycheck to paycheck or without access to paid sick leave, it’s an almost impossible decision.

In Long Beach, California, Melissa Love, 27, unloads trucks and stocks shelves for \$13.27 an hour at a local Walmart, where she’s worked for four years. She’s continued working at her steady clip of 32 hours a week, despite the economic slowdown.

Love has health insurance and would get two weeks of paid sick leave if she shows symptoms of COVID-19, but working in a crowded store and sharing a break room with other employees still makes her nervous.

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“It’s a gamble because you don’t know if they have the symptoms, and you’re like, Oh God, are they going to get me sick?” Love, who’s a member of a group called United for Respect, which is advocating for stronger worker protections during the pandemic, said. “I don’t get to work from home. I wish I could.”

For many workers, however, the arrival of the pandemic means there's suddenly no work at all.

Latonia Marshall, a housekeeper at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, had her hours slashed to zero last week. She's worried that without them, she'll lose her access to health insurance, too.

"Today is my last paycheck," she said, before breaking down in tears. "It's hard. It went from me having a full-time job to now not even having a job."

LATONIA MARSHALL

Marshall's union in Chicago, UNITE HERE, is raising funds to alleviate the hardship. But with two teenage sons depending on her at home, she's unsure what will happen next.

"I had to explain to them, now things are different. I'm not working," Marshall said. "I try not to let them see me break down. I don't want them to worry. I keep telling them everything's going to be okay, that we're going to get through this. This happened so fast. I wasn't expecting for it to be this bad, and it really is."

As the economy slows further to restrict the spread of the virus, conditions are expected to grow more dire. Last week the Labor Department reported jobless claims reached a two-year high, to 281,000 from 211,000. And that's just a blip compared to what's coming: Goldman Sachs predicts a spike to 2.25 million this week.

*Cover: A United Parcel Service delivery worker is seen delivering packages in the Tribeca neighborhood of Manhattan on March 19, 2020 in New York City. (Photo: Dia Dipasupil/Getty Images)*

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