The effect of COVID-19 on home care PSWs' work absence

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Introduction

- COVID-19 has increased absenteeism from work, with essential workers most affected[1-4] as a result of factors such as:
  - High risk of exposure due to the nature of their jobs[4]
  - Higher restrictions to limit work while symptomatic
  - Quarantining/self-isolating following exposure to COVID-19
  - Increased anxiety and burnout
- Home care Personal Support Workers (PSWs) are essential workers who have continued to provide care during the pandemic.
- However, PSWs' absence behaviours are not well understood and have important consequences for health human resource planning.

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Literature review

Studies that investigated absences/leaves among home care personnel is scarce. Key sources include:

- Prevalence of long-term sick leave among Swedish female home care personnel[5]
- Factors that impact the probability of receiving disability pension and long-term sick leave[6]
- Factors that impact sickness absence amongst Danish eldercare providers[7]

From the literature reviewed, absenteeism increased amongst health care workers during pandemics; however, most papers:

- Used hospital data
- Focused mainly on physicians and nurses

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Literature review

Little attention has been given to the home care sector and PSWs despite:

- The shift to community care and increased focus on aging in place
- Shortage of care providers in the home care sector
- Continued provision of care during the pandemic

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Research objective

What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on home care PSWs' short-term absence at work. Short-term absences may include:

- Sick Absences - paid and unpaid
- Personal Emergency Leaves - paid
- Unplanned Leaves - unpaid

This study focuses on PSW short-term absences. A separate paper investigates PSWs' long-term leaves of absence.

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Data & Methods

Data source:

▷ Southern Ontario home care agency typically employing >1,000 PSWs

▷ Administrative data captures PSW absences from January 2019 to August 2020

▷ Pay and benefits data were used to identify whether a sickness absence was paid or unpaid

Methods:

▷ Longitudinal trend analysis

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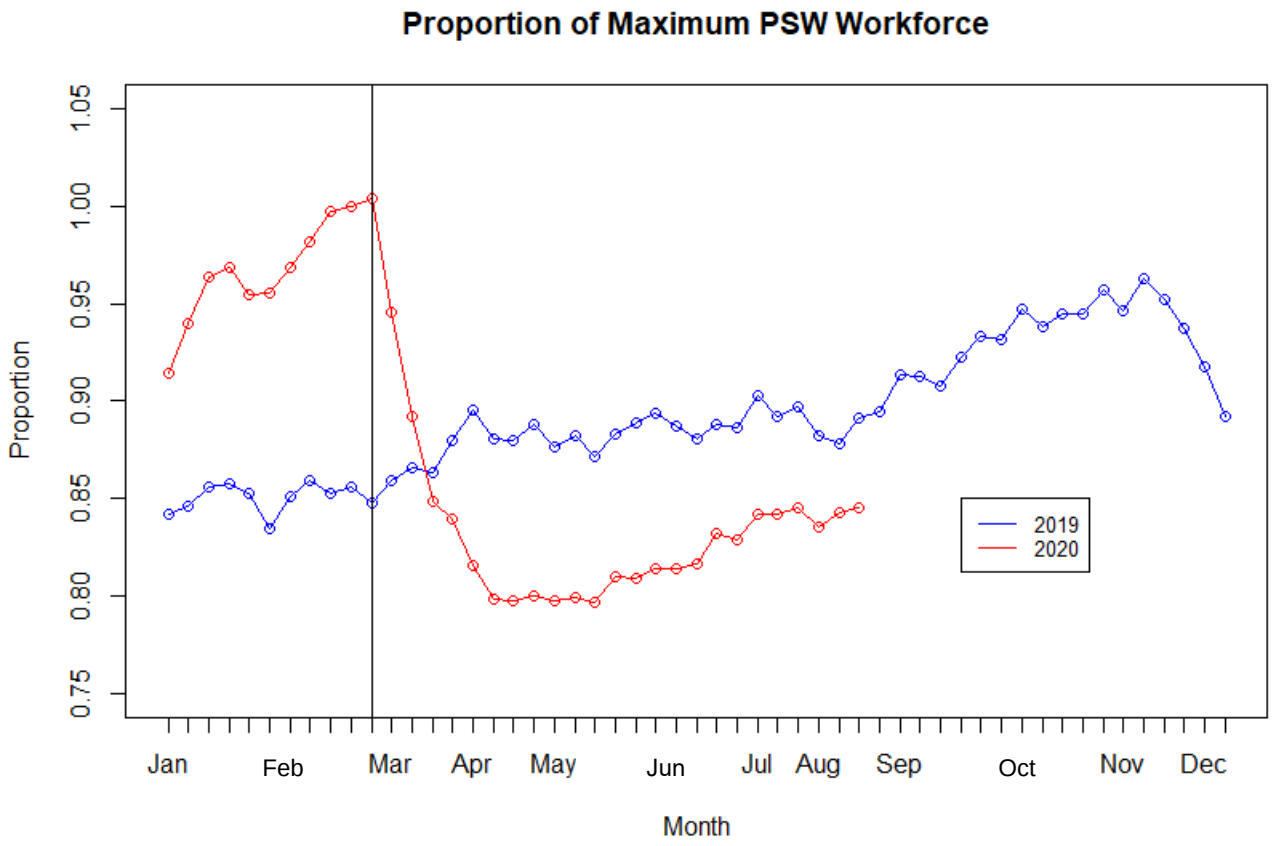
Results



The number of PSWs employed significantly decreased during the first wave of the pandemic.

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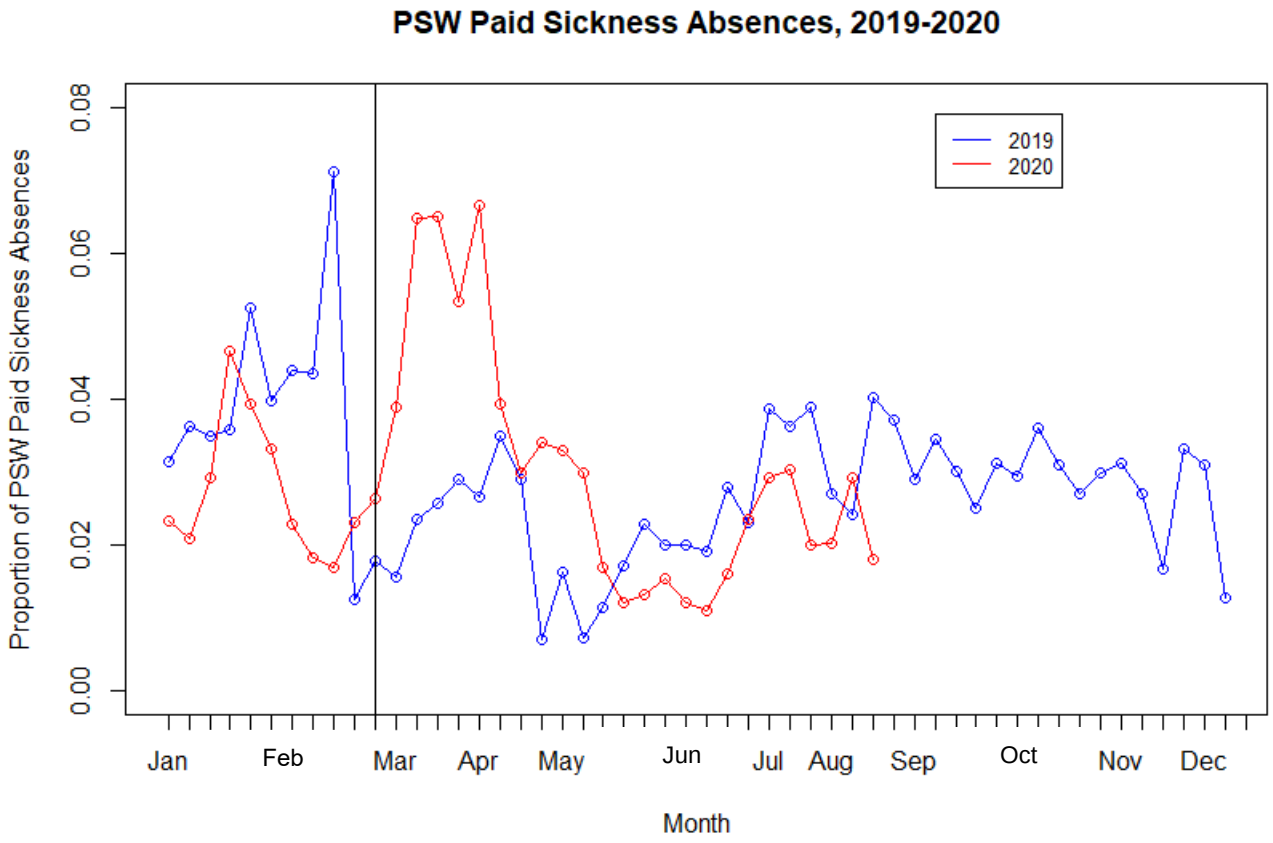

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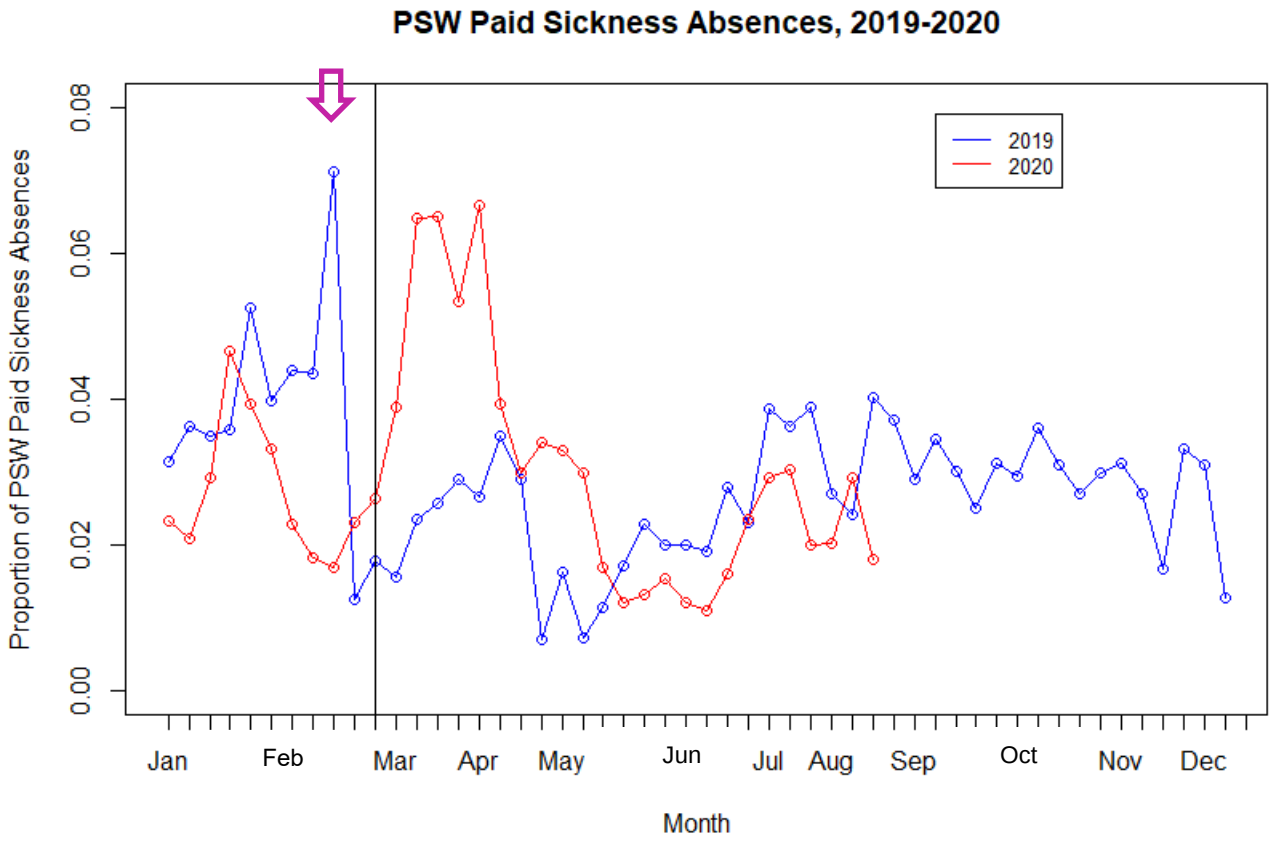

There was a spike in the last week of February 2019 that is 3 Standard Deviations (SD) relative to the pre-pandemic calculated mean.

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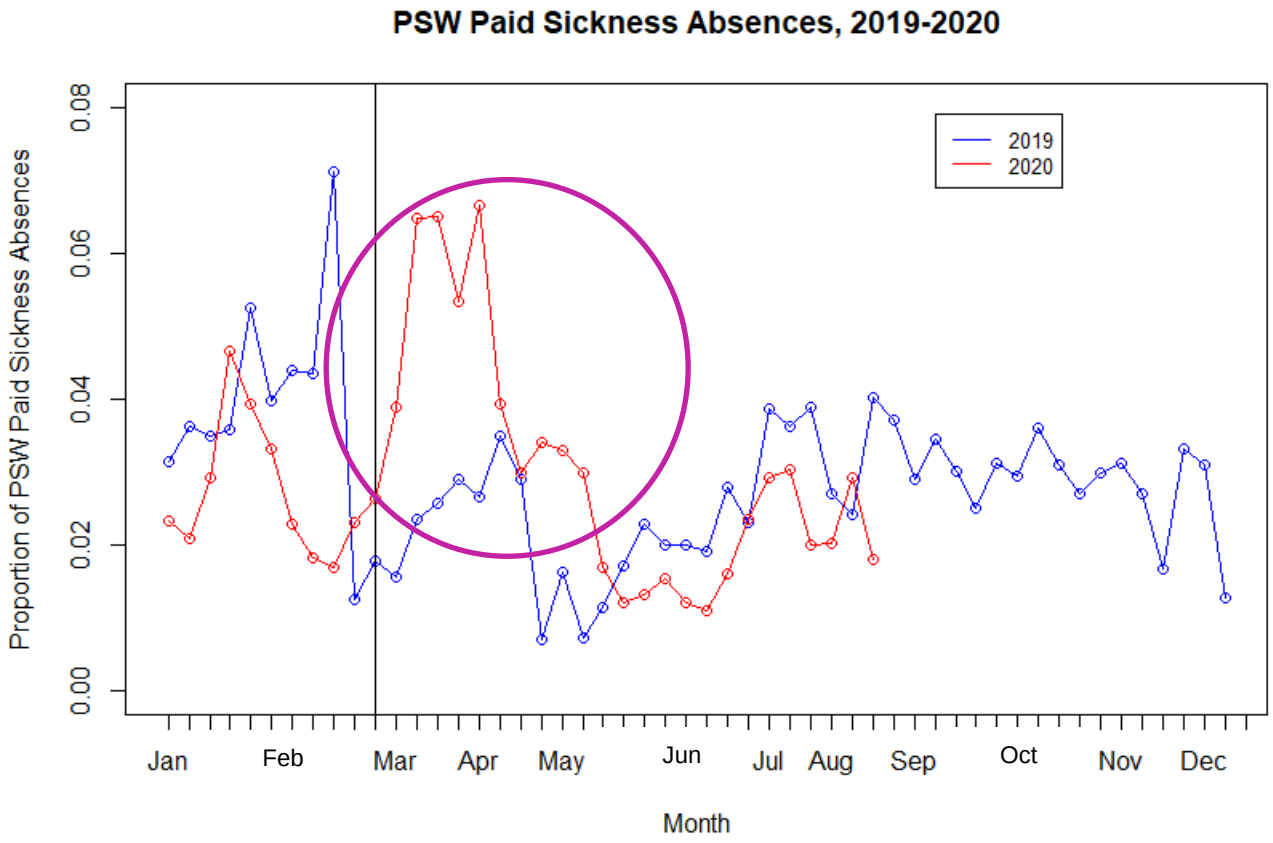

There was an increase in the proportion of paid sickness absences for 6 weeks after public health restrictions were announced in March 2020, peaking 3 SD relative to the pre-pandemic calculated mean.

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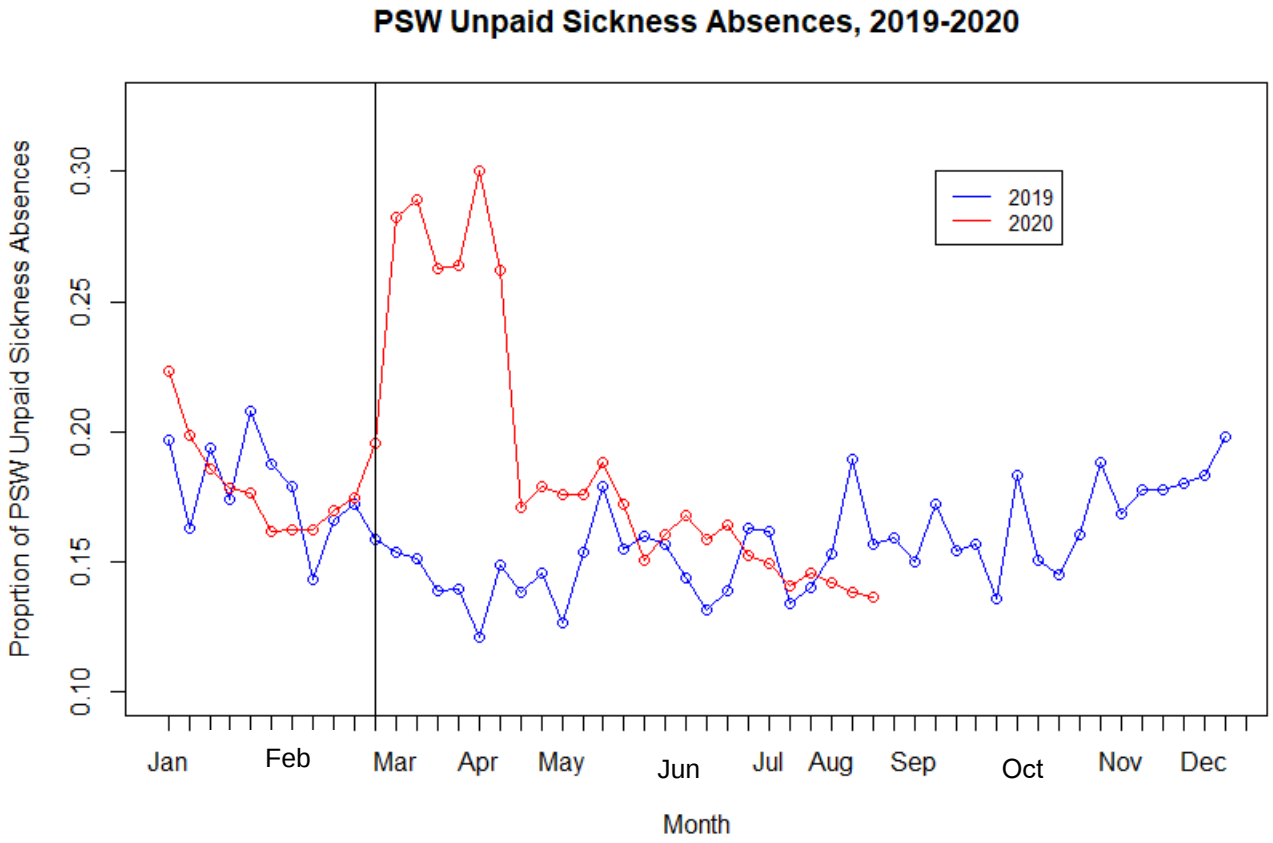

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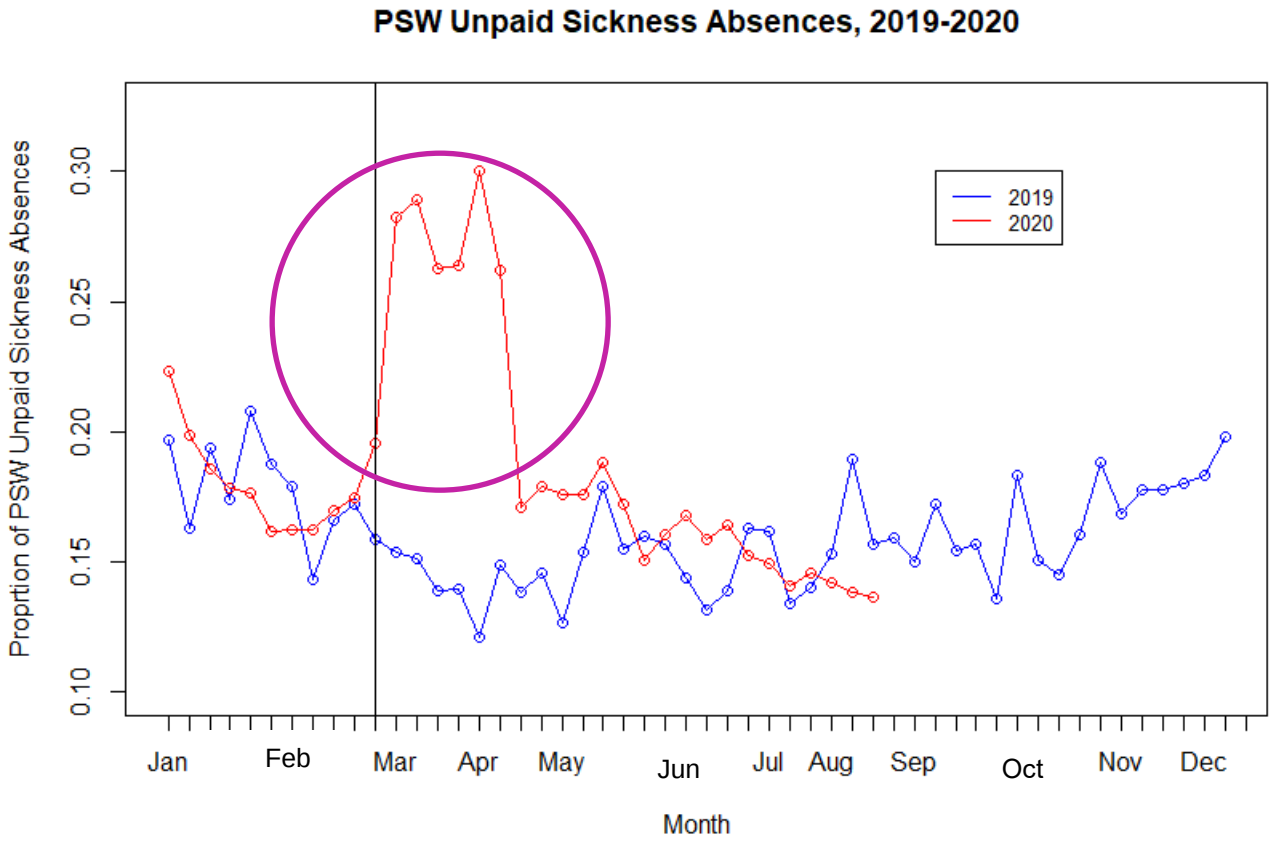

There was an increase in the proportion of unpaid sickness absences for 6 weeks after public health restrictions were announced in March 2020, peaking 5 SD relative to the pre-pandemic calculated mean.

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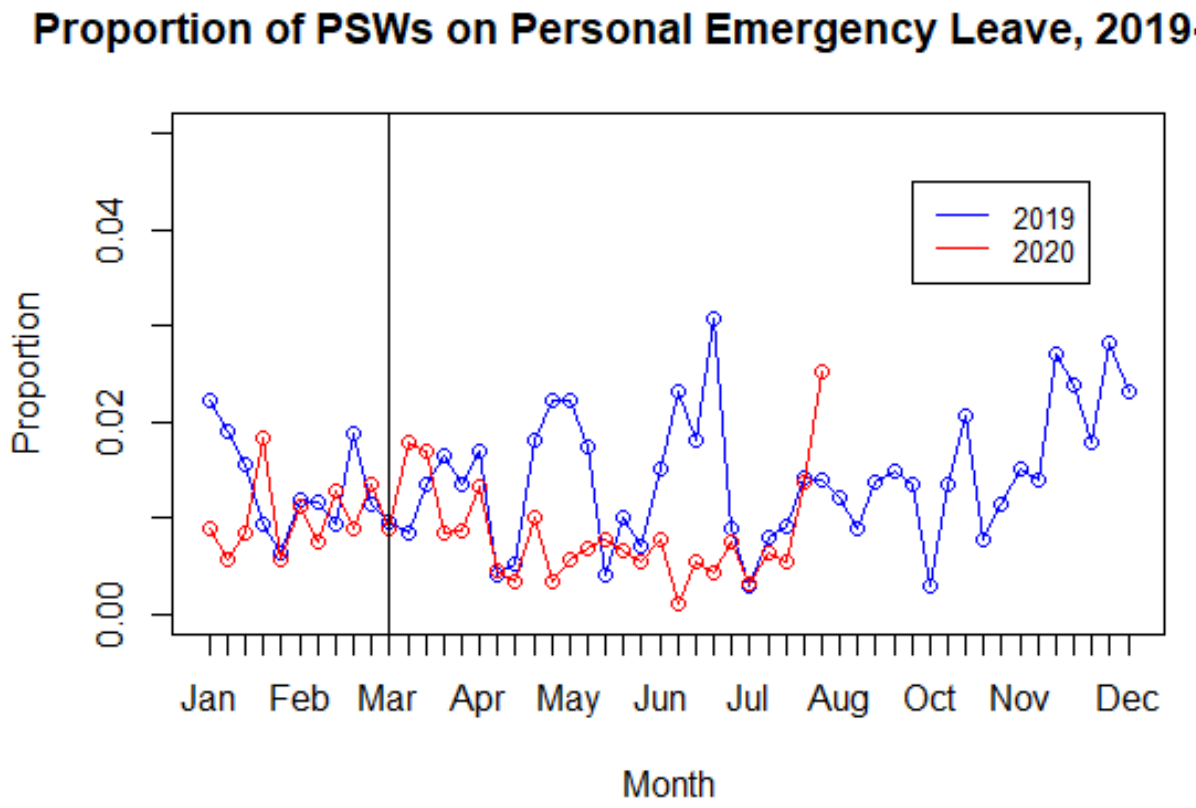

There were less PSW Personal Emergency Leaves during the first wave of the pandemic ($\bar{x}$=0.008) than before the pandemic ($\bar{x}$=0.013).

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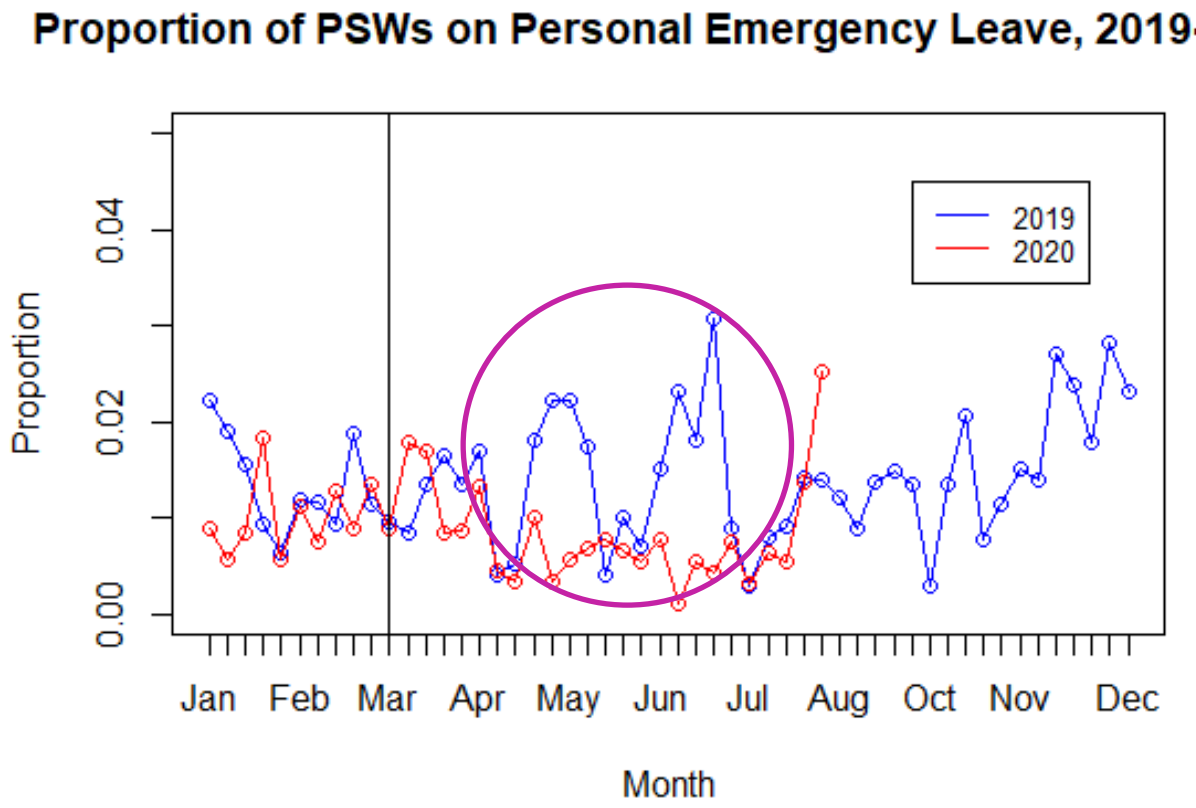

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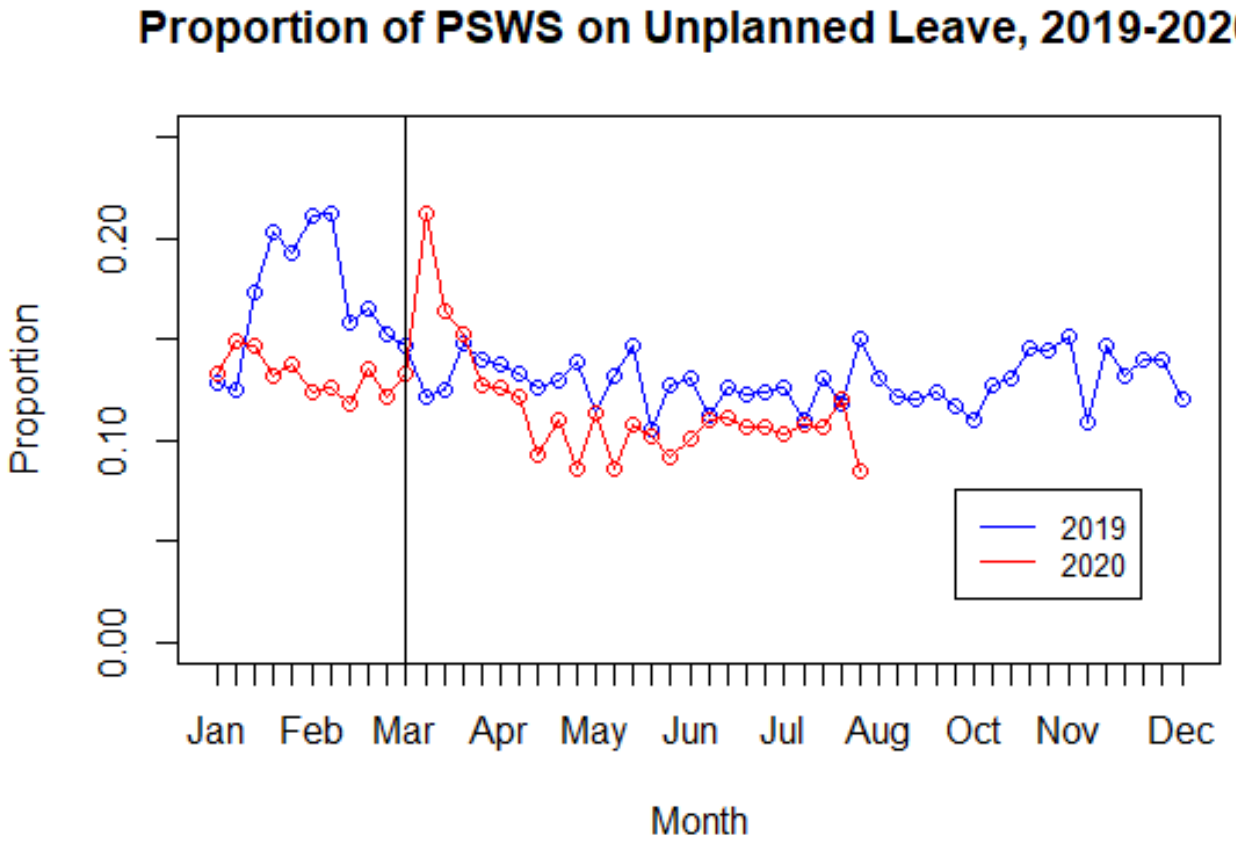

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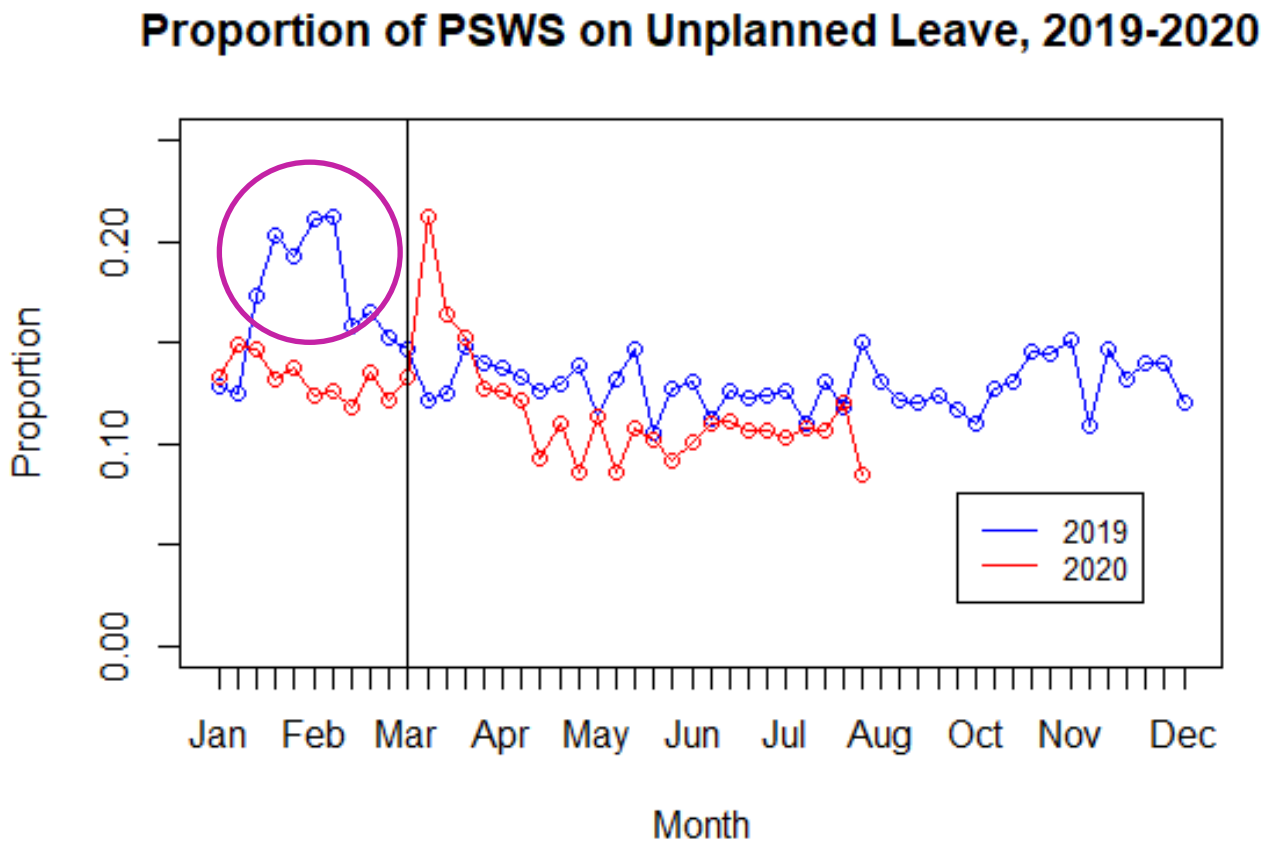

There was an increase in the proportion of PSW unplanned leaves for 8 weeks (peaking at 3 SD from the mean pre-pandemic) in the first months of 2019 corresponding to heavy snow fall.

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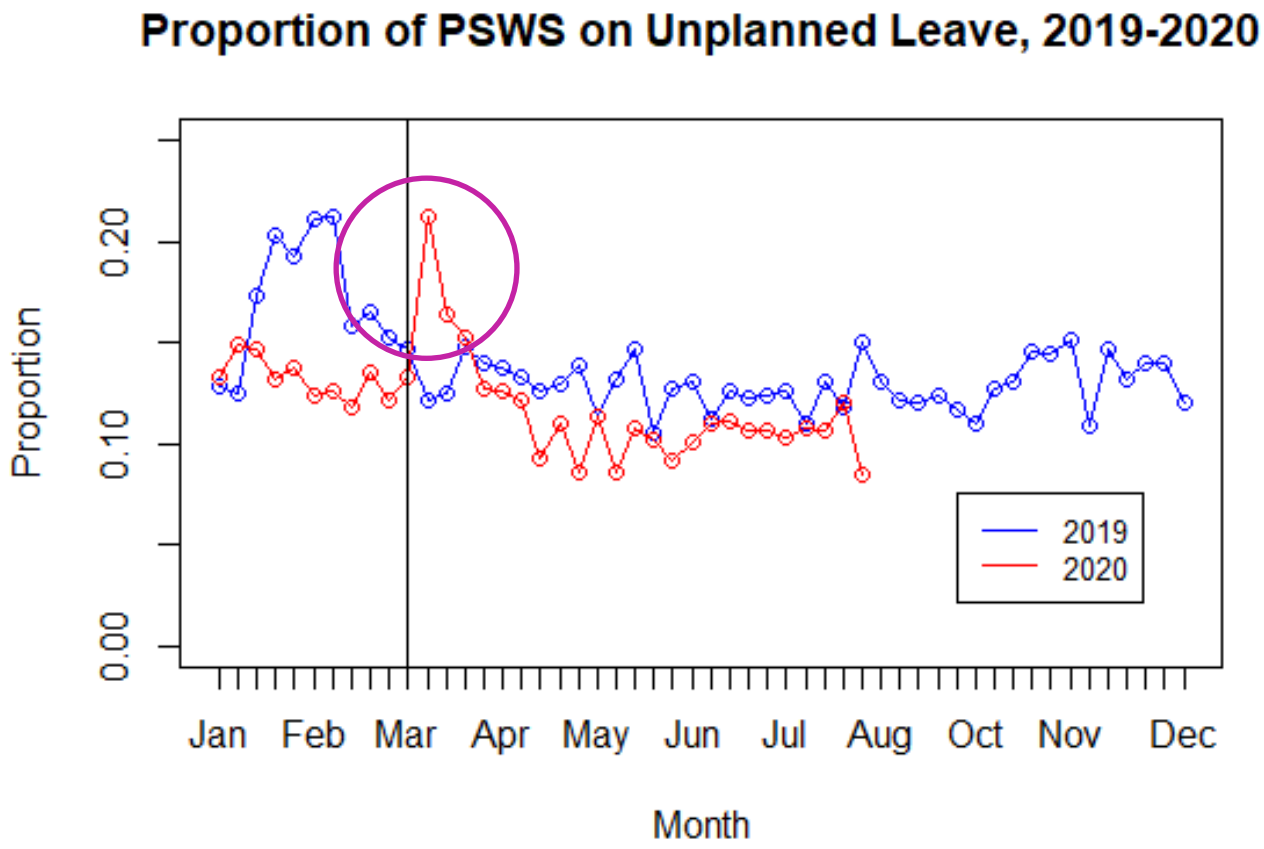
Results



There was an increase in the proportion of PSW unplanned leaves for 3 weeks (peaking at 3 SD from the mean pre-pandemic) after public health restrictions were announced in March 2020.

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Discussion

- The supply of working PSWs decreased during the first wave of the pandemic, with likely implications for the delivery of home care services.
- There was an increase in paid and unpaid absences six weeks after public health restrictions were announced
    - The increase in PSW paid sickness absences were possibly caused by increased restrictions to limit work while symptomatic, and an increased likelihood of filing for a paid leave.
    - Consistent with 2019, majority of sickness absences were unpaid.

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Discussion

- The decrease in personal emergency and unplanned absences during the first wave of the pandemic may be attributed to the following factors:
  - Going on a long-term leave because of caregiving responsibilities
  - Limited non-work activities
  - Greater financial incentive to work

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