

# Examining the Effect of COVID-19 Policies on Personal Support Worker (PSW) Leaves of Absence in a Canadian Home Care Setting

## Introduction

- During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, Canada, the number of home care Personal Support Workers (PSWs) going on a leaves of absence (LOAs) was particularly striking, with important implications for those seeking home care services since PSWs represent the largest proportion of frontline home care workers.
- The provincial government implemented multiple policies in an attempt to address challenges related to the pandemic, including PSW labour supply shortages.
- Whether the government-led policies were successful in reducing PSW LOAs once accounting for other factors such as contextual and individual factors is yet to be fully understood.

## Research Objective

- This study sought to understand the extent to which COVID-19 pandemic policies, contextual variables, and individual-level factors influenced home care PSW LOAs in the 'first wave' of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada.

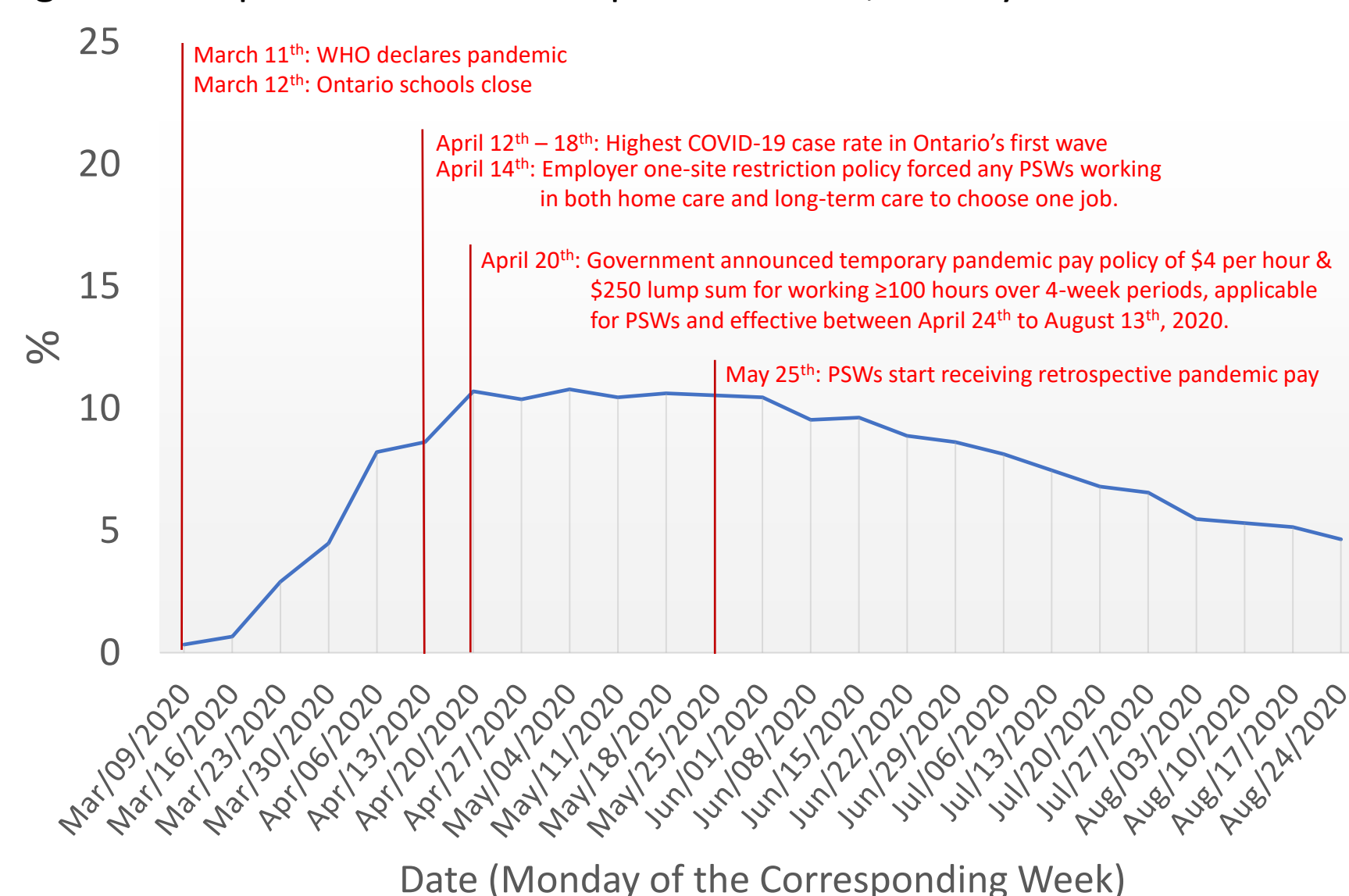
## Methods

- Data: Weekly administrative data from the weeks of March 9th to August 24th, 2020, for all PSWs employed and actively working within a home care organization (VHA Home HealthCare) the week prior to the World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 pandemic declaration.
- Analysis: PSWs' LOA status was modelled as a binomial outcome variable (not on an LOA (0) versus on an LOA (1)) using a multilevel logistic regression with weekly fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the individual level.

## Results

- The majority of the ~1200 PSWs who were actively working the week before the WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic were female (96.4%) with an average age of 47.3.
- Most PSWs held full-time employment status (88.7%) and an average hourly wage base rate of \$18.80 per hour (excluding top-up funding, travel pay, bonuses, etc.).
- 17.6% of these PSWs took an LOA at some point during the first wave (March 9th to August 30th, 2020).
- PSWs' top three self-reported reasons for an LOA were childcare (31.5%), illness/injury (15.8%), and the single-site employer restriction policy (15.5%).

Figure 1: Proportion of PSW Sample on an LOA, weekly over the First Wave



## Results, continued

- Significant decreases in LOAs were found both after the temporary pandemic pay policy was announced (-3.72%, p=0.00) and after PSWs started receiving retrospective pay from the policy (-2.56%, p=0.00), suggesting a combined policy effect of reducing LOAs by 6.28%.
- If a PSW worked outside of their assigned geographic work region in the last month of work, this correlated with a 2.6% higher likelihood of taking an LOA (p=0.00).
- All other statistically significant variables had a small effect (less than or equal to 1%) on a PSW's decision to go on an LOA.
- The highest COVID-19 case rate occurred the same week that the employer restriction policy was implemented, and the case rates and employer policy variables were highly correlated (p=0.00), therefore the significant effect of COVID-19 case rates may have partially captured the potential effect of the employer restriction policy. This will be further examined in future work.
- School closures were in effect throughout the time-period examined, so that the effect of school closures on PSWs taking LOAs to provide childcare could not be determined. Future models including a longer timespan will shed more light on this.

Table 1: Marginal Effects from Multilevel Logit Regression for LOA Status

Variable	Variable Level	Marginal Effects	SE	p
Gender	Male vs. female (ref)	4.034x10 <sup>-3</sup>	1.39	NS
Age	Continuous	-1.861x10 <sup>-5</sup>	0.03	NS
Ever reported a workplace limitation from 2019-20	One or more vs. never (ref)	-2.136x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.66	NS
Ever reported a workplace incident from 2019-20	One or more vs. never (ref)	2.564x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.69	NS
Drove a vehicle to work	Yes vs. no (ref)	1.023x10 <sup>-2</sup>	0.18	0.00
Insurance type	No insurance reported (ref)			
	Individual insurance	2.955x10 <sup>-3</sup>	1.14	NS
	Family insurance	6.639x10 <sup>-3</sup>	1.18	NS
Job tenure (weeks employed)	Continuous	-8.472x10 <sup>-4</sup>	0.09	NS
Employment status	Part-time or casual vs. Full-time (ref)	-1.388x10 <sup>-2</sup>	1.20	NS
Guaranteed work hours (30+ per two weeks)	Yes vs. no (ref)	6.778x10 <sup>-3</sup>	1.47	NS
Average number of hours worked in last month of work	Continuous	-3.535x10 <sup>-4</sup>	0.05	NS
Hourly wage in last week of work (base rate)	Continuous	1.465x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.42	NS
Average weekly income in last month of work	Continuous	-6.311x10 <sup>-5</sup>	0.00	0.00
Working outside of defined geographic area in last month of work	Yes or no (ref)	0.026	0.68	0.00
Average health status of clients in last month of work	Scale of 1-5, with 1 as most urgent care needs	2.743x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.23	NS
Average age of clients in last month of work	Continuous	3.212x10 <sup>-4</sup>	0.01	0.00
Proportion of clients living alone in last month of work	Continuous	-7.213x10 <sup>-4</sup>	0.68	NS
Proportion of clients that were male in last month of work	Continuous	-1.095x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.74	NS
Average number of unique clients in last month of work	Continuous	-2.31x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.05	0.00
Short-term absence in last month of work	Yes vs. no (ref)	-6.272x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.19	0.00
Policy: temporary pandemic pay announced	After announcement vs. Pre-announcement (ref)	-0.037	0.52	0.00
Policy: first retrospective pandemic pay received	After pay received vs. Pre-pay received (ref)	-0.026	0.35	0.00
Policy: one site employer restrictions	After implementation vs. Pre-implementation(ref)	-9.242x10 <sup>-4</sup>	0.62	NS
Context: weekly COVID-19 case rates in Ontario	Continuous	2.471x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.29	0.00
Time, in weeks	Week number 0-25	-1.725x10 <sup>-3</sup>	0.10	0.00

Standard errors (SE) were clustered at the individual level; Non-significant (NS) p-values (P) were not reported, but available upon request. The reference group is indicated by '(ref)'.

## Discussion & Conclusion

- Results here suggest that the temporary pandemic pay policy had a small but significant effect on reducing LOAs for PSWs working in a home care organization in Ontario, Canada during the pandemic.
- Policy-makers seeking to increase PSW labour supply should note the expected impact of wage policies on PSWs' decision to work.
- Home care organizations seeking to retain PSWs should be aware of the significant effect that scheduling, such as the amount of work scheduled outside of PSWs' typical geographic regions, can have on PSW labour supply decisions.
- Findings emphasize the importance of wages and scheduling considerations in driving changes to PSW labour supply behaviours which may be generalizable to other home care organizations.