Textual Analysis of Media Coverage on Women's Employment during Covid-19 Recovery: Personal Choice versus Systemic Insufficiencies

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Abstract : During the Covid-19 pandemic, women disproportionately left the workforce compared to men, and many remained outside of the labor market during the Covid-19 recovery period—a phenomenon referred to as the "she-recession" or "shecession." While the number of women returning to work has increased, long-standing systemic inequalities interfere with women's equal participation in the workforce. Previous research on media framing has explored the importance of news coverage of women's issues in print and magazines to shaping the public's views on an issue and the national response. This study adopts textual analysis to examine how 50 news stories published on CNN and CBS in March 2023 frame women's employment challenges as a matter of choice or as a matter of insufficient systems and analyzes the narratives portrayed to understand how this discourse affects national policies regarding women's equality in the workforce. Findings suggest that media coverage centers on four themes: unequal wages at work, work-life integration, experiences of minority women, and the struggle to acquire leadership positions. Media coverage gives space to women to tell personal stories about facing these four societal challenges. However, little coverage is devoted to the political figures and institutions that either reinforce gender inequalities or advance women's rights in these areas. These findings highlight the need for media stories that discuss policies and reforms that broaden the choices available to women in the first place.