ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

ILR Worker Institute

Declining State Government Employment in Mental Health-Related Industries has Disproportionately Affected Women and Workers of Color: Four Key Findings

A new analysis of U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) data by Cornell ILR School researchers demonstrates that New York State's Mental Health- (MH) related workforce has been undergoing significant structural changes since at least the turn of the new millennium, and those changes have disproportionately affected women and workers of color.[1,2]

KEY FINDING #1: Since at least 2000, MH work in New York State has been characterized by reinforcing trends of privatization and state government austerity.

Specifically, despite overall employment growth in MH-related industries between 2000 and 2020, the number of MH workers employed by the New York State (NYS) government has fallen by roughly 10%, with most of that contraction happening in the last ten years. Table A, below, shows that the number of employees working in private sector MH-related facilities grew markedly over the past two decades (+34.5%), with growth occurring relatively evenly before and after 2010. By contrast, the number of workers in state-owned MH-related facilities experienced a sizeable decrease over the past two decades (-9.9%) – a trend that has taken shape mostly since 2010.

Table A. Opposing Trends in the Number of Workers Working in Private Sector and State Government MH-Related Industries[3] in NYS, 2000-2020

Year	Private Sector	Decade-Over-Decade % Change (Private)	State Government	Decade-Over-Decade % Change (State Government)	State Government Share of Workers in Selected MH-Related Industries
2000	360,355	N/A	36,520	N/A	9.2%
2010	421,889	17.1%	35,965	-1.5%	7.9%
2020	484,801	14.9%	32,900	-8.5%	6.4%
Overall % Change (2000-2020)		34.5%		-9.9%	-2.8 percentage points

Crucially, the shrinking levels of state government employment in MH-related industries do not appear to be race- and gender-neutral.

KEY FINDING #2: Black or African American New Yorkers were more likely to fall out of the public sector MH workforce than workers from any other Census Bureau-tracked racial-ethnic group.

From 2000 to 2020, the largest drop in the MH-related state government workforce occurred among Black or African American workers. There total number of such workers fell by 2,539 in the past two decades. For comparison, the number of white workers in the same industries fell by a relatively similar level (-2,368); however, there were more than twice as many white workers (20,963) than Black or African American workers (9,456) in these MH-related fields at the start of the millennium. Thus, the drop in the number of Black or African American workers in MH-related state government industries occurred at a disproportionately high rate (-26.9%) compared to white workers (-11.3%).

KEY FINDING #3: Uneven patterns of private sector growth and public sector contraction in the MH workforce in NYS has positively affected racial diversity in the former, while decreasing diversity in the latter.

At the same time public sector contraction of MH-related jobs disproportionately affected workers of color, private sector job growth in these industries was driven by workers of color. The number of Black or African American workers in private sector MH-related industries increased by 25.1% between 2000 and 2020, compared to a 19.3% increase for white workers. Using a standard racial diversity index that ranges from 0 (all workers identify with the same racial group) to 100 (maximum diversity), Table B shows that the private sector MH workforce has become meaningfully more diverse over the past 20 years. Meanwhile, fueled by the heavy, racially uneven job loss that occurred since 2010 (Table A), racial diversity in the state government MH workforce has begun to tick downward.

Table B. Changing Racial-Ethnic Diversity of the NYS MH-Related Workforce, by Sector (2000-2020)*

Year	Private Sector	State Government
2000	59.3	59.4
2010	61.8	62.0
2020	65.7	61.7

*The Diversity Index ranges from 0 (complete homogeneity) to 100 (maximum diversity). Higher values indicate greater racial-ethnic diversity

KEY FINDING #4: Reflecting intersectionalities in MH-related work, in addition to disproportionately affecting workers of color, contraction of the state government MH workforce has negatively impacted more women than men; however, Black men experienced the largest relative drop in state government MH job numbers.

Accounting for gender, Black or African American women have disappeared from the state government MH-related workforce in the largest quantities over the past two decades.

The number of workers from this group fell by -1,793 between 2000 and 2020, compared to a decrease of -1,680 white women.

However, white women outnumbered Black or African American women in this workforce by more than two-to-one at the start of the millennium (13,674 to 6,755, respectively), meaning that Black women experienced a disproportionately high rate of contraction over the past 20 years (-26.5%) relative to white women (-12.3%).

The corresponding percentage change for Black or African American men (-27.6%) was even larger than the rate observed for Black or African American women, and roughly three times the rate observed for white men (-9.4%).

Whereas the number of state government MH-related workers who identify as either Asian (+938 workers [+39.1%]) or Hispanic/Latinx (+511 workers [+19.5%]) increased between 2000 and 2020,[4] the gains made by these groups were far below corresponding gains observed in the private sector (+90.1% and +93.8%, respectively).

CONCLUSION: Over the past two decades, observable trends in mental health workforce numbers in New York State are consistent with moves toward privatization and state government austerity. These trends have disproportionately affected women and workers of color, with more Black or African American workers – especially women – disappearing from public sector MH-related industries than any other group.

Why Do These Findings Matter? In New York State, a public sector worker is over five times more likely to belong to a union compared to a private sector employee.[5] According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "workers with union representation enjoy a significant pay premium compared to non-union workers."[6] The Cornell ILR School report from which this factsheet was created found that, in 2020, the median annual salary of a full-time worker in a MH-related industry was over $1,700 greater for a state government employee compared to their private sector counterpart.[7] These wage differentials were even higher ($5,000 or greater) for traditionally working-class occupations like building cleaning staff, secretaries, and personal care aides.[8] Thus, the bottom line is that **trends toward privatization and state government austerity in the New York State mental health workforce are costing New Yorkers good paying union jobs, and the good jobs being lost have been disproportionately held by women and workers of color. Without reinvestment into – and meaningful job (re-)creation within – the NYS government MH workforce, observable trends will continue to exacerbate patterns of racial, gender, and economic inequality in New York.**

ENDNOTES

1 Data for specific MH-related industries have not been reported consistently over time in the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS). As such, it is necessary to again adopt second-best strategies to analyze the changing composition of the MH workforce in NYS with PUMS data. The specific strategy used herein is as follows: because data are not consistently available for the specific industries of interest (NAICS codes 6222 and 6232) for the various time periods under examination (2000, 2010, 2020), the research team zoomed out to relevant "parent" industries (here, NAICS 622 and 623M). Thus, findings from analyses on PUMS data describe conditions for employees working in either Hospitals (NAICS 622) or Residential Care Facilities (NAICS 623M) in NYS.

2 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy.

3 Refer to footnote 1 on industry selection.

4 For Asian workers, this increase occurred for both men and women. For Hispanic or Latinx workers, the observed group-level increase was made possible only by a relatively large uptick in the number of women in NAICS industries 622 and 623M (+700 workers [+44.1%]) vis-à-vis a slight decrease in the number of Hispanic/Latinx men working in these fields (-189 workers [-18.3%]).

5 "Union Membership, Coverage, Density and Employment by State, 2021." https://unionstats.com/

6 U.S. Department of Labor. "The Union Advantage." **https://www.dol.gov/general/workcenter/union-advantage**

7 Weaver, Russell, Brady, Anne Marie, and West, Zoë. 2023, New York State Public Employees' Employment and Wages in a Time of Austerity: The Case of the Mental Health Sector. Cornell ILR School. Refer especially to Table 8.

8 Id at Table 13.