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High work loads, unclear accommodations: COVID-19 leaves U of T instructors isolated and exhausted

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How the crisis exacerbates gender, racial inequities in academia

By Jadine Ngan, The Varsity

On the first day of June 2020, Romila Verma's daughter was very sick. Verma, a sessional lecturer in the Department of Geography, sat on her daughter's bed with her computer — she had a remote quiz to administer. In the pit of her stomach, she had an unsettling sense that something was going to go wrong.

At 1:00 pm, the quiz went live to 200 students. For the first five minutes, everything looked normal. Then, all at once, Verma's email inbox was flooded with notifications. She had accidentally given her students the correct answers.

"My daughter was throwing up, so I had a bucket for her throw-up, and I was looking at the computer. I had no idea what I did." As she was trying to fix the quiz, her students lost access and began panicking, worried that they might get a zero. Verma's older daughter, a second-year student at McMaster University, helped her troubleshoot. Ultimately, she had to postpone the quiz.

In the months since the COVID-19 pandemic forced U of T to move nearly all of its classes online, instructors of all kinds — including tenured and tenure-track professors, sessional lecturers, and teaching assistants — have needed to adjust to the demands of a new mode of work. As Verma's experience illustrates, that adjustment has not been easy.

Read the full article

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