

Barbers, hair stylists split on safety of reopening during the pandemic

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About three-fourths of hair stylists, barbers and salon owners in Texas have reopened in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic out of concern for their livelihoods, but they remain split about the safety of that

decision.

And almost six out of 10 said they can't match their pre-pandemic earnings while also practicing social distancing, despite urging from public health officials to remain at least six feet away from people outside your immediate household.

The survey was conducted by the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston as part of a series of surveys to determine the impact of COVID-19 on various sectors of the Texas economy. It was conducted in conjunction with Farouk Systems, a Houston-based manufacturer of [hair](#) care products.

Almost 90% of hair stylists and barbers surveyed said they have returned to work; about the same number said they had no choice but to return for economic reasons.

"Hair salons and barber shops have become a symbol for the tough decisions about when to reopen the Texas economy," said former state Sen. Kirk P. Watson, founding dean of the Hobby School. "Their services can't be automated, making them a [focal point](#) for the economic damage caused by the pandemic."

Among the other findings:

- Respondents were evenly split about the safety of reopening, with 30% saying they agreed or strongly agreed it was safe to reopen. An additional 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining 36% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 54% said they would have preferred to wait before returning to work but feared losing clients to shops that did reopen.
- 31% said it will take between three and six months for their businesses to return to normal; an additional 33% expect it to

take up to a year.

Reopening the state's hair salons became a political talking point in early May, just before the survey was taken. Mark P. Jones, a research associate at the Hobby School and a political science professor at Rice University, said almost all of the survey respondents were familiar with the case of Dallas salon owner Shelley Luther, who in April reopened her salon in defiance of Gov. Greg Abbott's order for salons to remain closed.

"Far more of Luther's hair care professional peers disapproved of her decision to open than approved, by a nearly 5 to 1 margin," Jones said. "While Luther received considerable support from numerous politicians and groups, the survey suggests her colleagues in the hair care industry were much less supportive of her actions."

The survey drew responses from 101 barbers, stylists and salon owners, most of them individual stylists and barbers. About 76% of those responding were women; 53% were Anglo, 28% were Latino, 16% were African American and 3% said they belonged to another racial or ethnic group. Responses were collected between May 26 and June 14.

More information: uh.edu/hobby/salons/

Provided by University of Houston

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