

80% of U.S. adults have had serious hardship, financial insecurity during pandemic

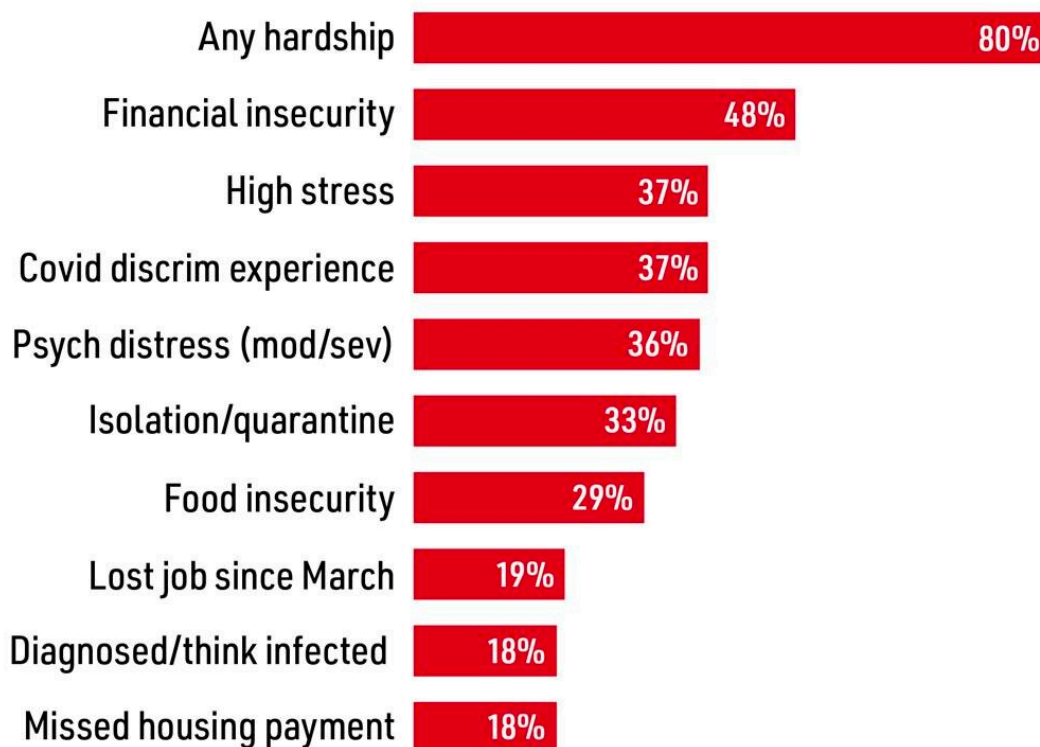
May 21 2021

Understanding Coronavirus in America

USC
Dornsife
*Center for Economic
and Social Research*

Share of adults experiencing serious hardships during the pandemic

% ever experienced the following April 2020 – March 2021



Findings are based on responses from 8,425 survey participants, who were drawn from the more than 9,000 members of the Understanding America Study. The margin of sampling error is +/- 1 percentage point. Margins of sampling error may be higher for race and ethnicity subgroups. More info at covid19pulse.usc.edu

Credit: University of Southern California

To measure the serious hardships people have experienced over the course of the pandemic and the distribution of those experiences across the population of U.S. adults, the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research developed the Pandemic Misery Index, drawing on data from the Understanding Coronavirus in America Study, the only nationally representative survey continuously fielded since the start of the pandemic.

The index includes nine measures of serious hardship: financial insecurity, [food insecurity](#), moderate/severe psychological distress, symptoms of high stress, job loss since March 2020, COVID-based discrimination, a missed housing payment, being placed in isolation or quarantine, and a COVID diagnosis or perceived COVID infection.

Prevalence of serious hardships during the pandemic

From high stress to food insecurity to losing a job, 8 in 10 U.S. residents experienced at least one serious economic, psychological or health-related hardship since April 2020.

Most common serious hardships

Almost half of U.S. adults (48%) reported financial insecurity at some point since April 2020, with 29% experiencing food insecurity and 18% missing one or more rent or mortgage payments. More than one-third reported symptoms of high stress (37%), moderate to severe psychological distress (36%), and/or at least one experience of COVID-based discrimination (37%). One-third (33%) reported being placed in isolation or quarantine.

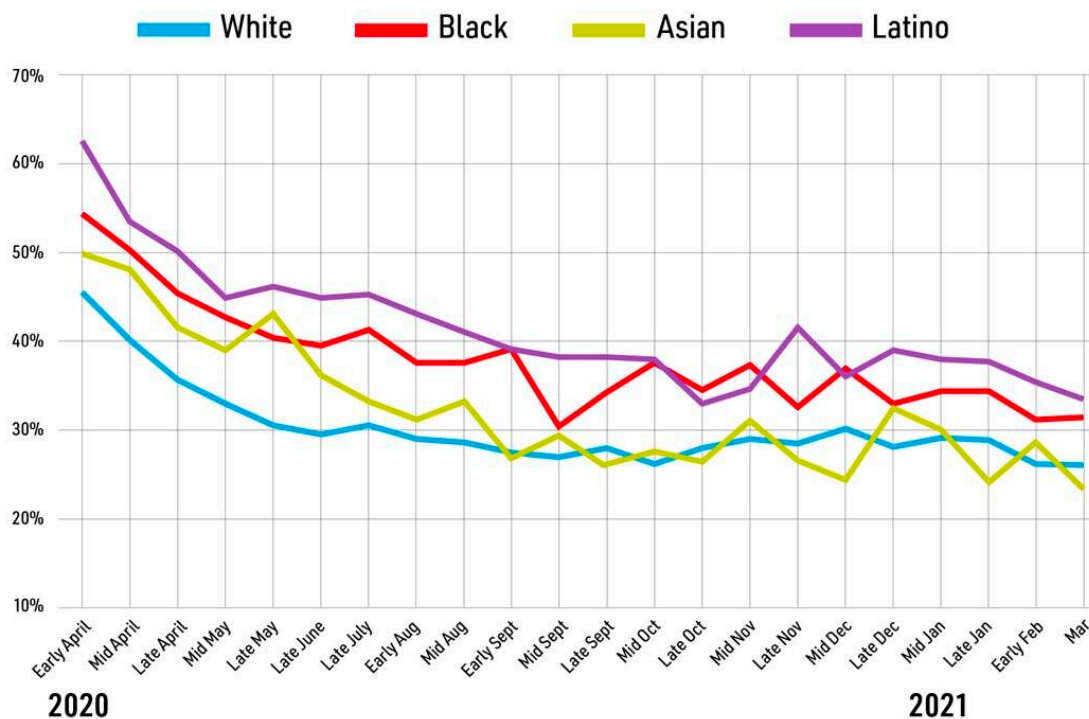
Changing experiences of hardships, over time

In April 2020, as the U.S. economy stumbled and unemployment reached double digits, 50% of U.S. residents reported experiencing some kind of serious economic, psychological or health-related hardship. Since then, the prevalence of these hardships has declined 22 percentage points to 28% in late March 2021.

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Change in the share of adults, by race, experiencing one or more serious hardships



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Credit: University of Southern California

Distribution of serious hardships by race/ethnicity

The burden of COVID-related hardship falls unequally across the U.S. population. Almost 9 in 10 Latinos (89%) have faced at least one serious hardship during the pandemic, compared to 86% of Black people, 80% of Asians, and 76% of white people. While the percentage of people experiencing a serious hardship has declined for all races/ethnicities, the share of Latino and Black people facing hardships. remains much higher.

Latinos and Blacks experience greater share of hardships

"Despite unprecedented economic stimulus and direct financial support to individuals and families, hardships related to the pandemic persist. As recently as the end of March, more than 2-in-10 U.S. adults experienced [financial insecurity](#), 7% were food insecure and 6% missed a house payment," says Jill Darling, survey director, USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research.

"In many cases, the burden of pandemic misery is falling disproportionately on communities of color. Latino and Black adults continue to face economic- and health-related distress at higher rates than other racial and [ethnic groups](#) and will likely face a more difficult path to recovery from the [pandemic](#)," says Kyla Thomas, sociologist, USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research.

The data was collected from participants in the Understanding America Study (UAS), which is a nationally representative, probability-based online panel of adults who regularly answer tracking survey questions.

Findings in this release are based on responses from 8,425 participants, who were drawn from the more than 9,000 members of the UAS.

Participants responded between April 1, 2020, and March 30, 2021. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 1 percentage point. Margins of sampling error may be higher for race and ethnicity subgroups and are available in the survey's topline and crosstab reports at COVID19pulse.usc.edu.

More information: The report is available online:
[universityofsoutherncalifornia ... fjjuktd-auytjdtdt-c/](https://www.southern.california.edu/news/2021-05-adults-hardship-financial-insecurity-pandemic.html)

Provided by University of Southern California

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