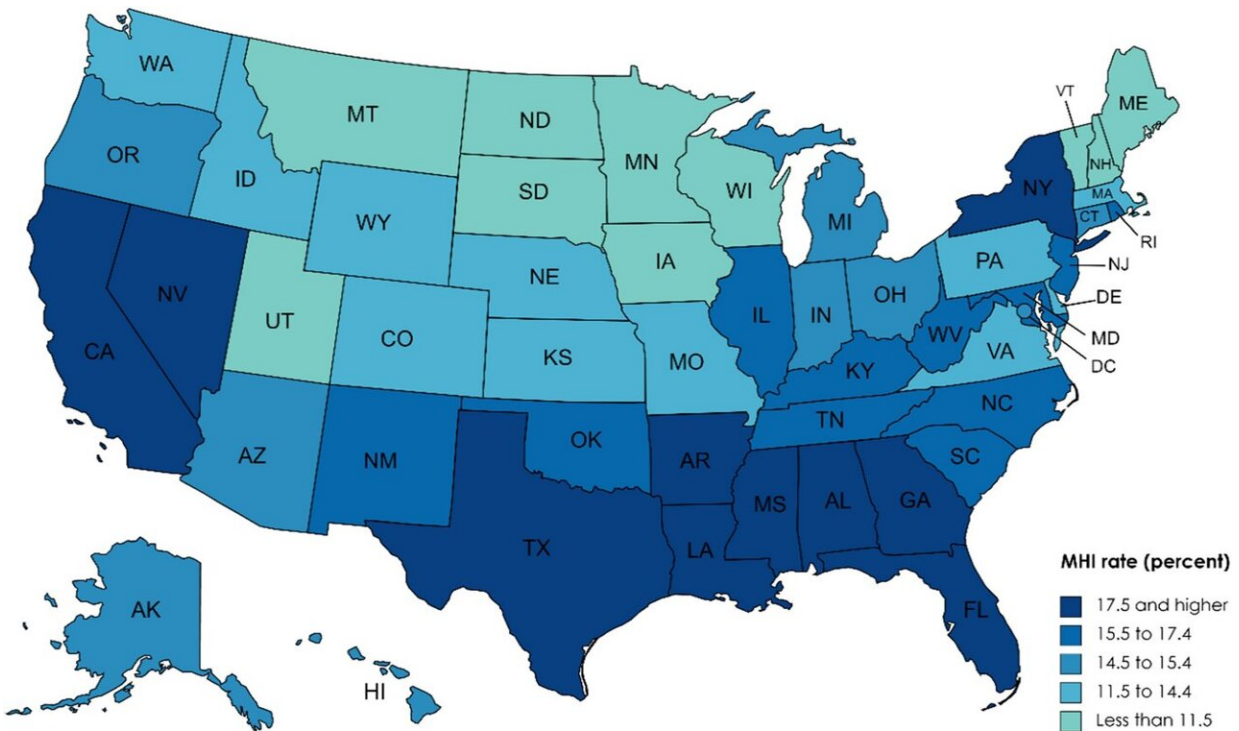


Study charts America's monthly struggle with COVID-19 hardships

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Statewide Variation in the MHI. Authors' calculations based on Household Pulse Survey between April 2020 and March 2022. MHI estimates are based on combined microdata from all months. Credit: *Social Indicators Research* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s11205-023-03176-9

As many as one in five Americans experienced multiple hardships during the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the most common combination being job insecurity paired with mental health issues, according to a new study from Georgia Tech's School of Economics.

The study, "Multidimensional Hardships in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic," published in the journal *Social Indicators Research*, is the first to provide a month-to-month picture detailing how the combined impacts of job and housing insecurity, trouble putting food on the table, and [mental health](#) took a toll on Americans during the most difficult months of the [pandemic](#), from April 2020 to March 2022.

Such research emphasizes the need for policies to address overlapping challenges to help protect U.S. residents the next time a pandemic strikes, said Shatakshee Dhongde, associate professor in the School of Economics and the study's lead author.

"As we continue to navigate the lingering repercussions of the pandemic, we must work to understand the multifaceted nature of these hardships if we hope to design effective policies," Dhongde said. "Our research aims to provide policymakers with insights into these overlapping challenges in hopes of fostering a more resilient and equitable society."

Month-to-month hardships detailed

As part of their study, Dhongde and Brian Glassman, Chief of Poverty Statistics at the U.S. Census Bureau, created an index representing the degree to which Americans experienced combined hardships. It peaked in December 2020, just ahead of the pandemic's second major spike in cases and deaths. It began to fall until April 2021, a month after the third round of economic stimulus payments from the U.S. government. The index remained steady until December 2021—amid the pandemic's third

major peak in cases and deaths.

The study found that individual concerns about [job insecurity](#) peaked very early in the pandemic, in April 2020, as many states were imposing lockdowns and other measures to slow the virus' spread. Housing insecurity reached its apex in July 2020, while [food insecurity](#) and [mental health issues](#) topped out in December 2020.

Dhongde's study also reinforces previous findings that hardships during the pandemic affected minorities more than [white people](#). For instance, the study found that Black and Latino adults faced more food insufficiency than white adults.

The researchers also examined the disparate geographic impact of the pandemic, determining that residents of southern and western states were hit hardest by multiple hardships.

Data for the study came from the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, created to gather information on the well-being of U.S. residents during the pandemic.

Dhongde has become a champion for considering the combined effects of financial and non-financial measures of well-being to understand the impact of economic conditions and crises such as the pandemic.

For instance, her previous research has shown that people with less education are more likely to have [health issues](#), suggesting literacy education as a way to help people make better [health](#) choices—and to hold down the cost of health care.

"Crises such as the pandemic are never solely health issues. They are also employment and food issues, among other things," she said. "We can really only understand the full extent of their impact by looking at all

of these measures at once."

More information: Shatakshee Dhongde et al, Multidimensional Hardships in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Social Indicators Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s11205-023-03176-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03176-9)

Provided by Georgia Institute of Technology

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