



JUSTICE, HOUSING, AND
HEALTH STUDY

JustHouHS
Community
Report:
COVID
Update

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About JustHouHS

The Justice, Housing, and Health Study (JustHouHS) is a research project investigating how mass incarceration, housing instability, and housing policies are related to health. To better understand these issues, we conducted a survey of 400, and interviews with 54, low-income New Haven residents, half of whom were released from prison or jail within a year of study enrollment. Between 2017 and 2020, participants came into our study office every six months to give us their input.

Covid Research

We conducted another round of data collection to capture the experience of life during the COVID pandemic. This community report is based on responses to the COVID survey taken between December 2020 and June 2021. 259 participants completed the survey. Due to social distancing, participants were not able to take the survey at our offices as they had in the past. Instead, about two thirds took the survey online, and the remaining participants completed it over the phone with a staff member.

For many communities, COVID has exacerbated economic and housing instability. Throughout the pandemic, federal and state governments have dedicated massive amounts of resources, for extended periods of time, to U.S. citizens. Policies were also passed to protect people from the virus and the economic repercussions of the pandemic. The JustHouHS COVID survey asked questions about participants' experiences with COVID and the policies meant to help people better cope with its impacts.

This report begins by describing how COVID affected the personal lives and social networks of participants. It then documents what criminal legal involvement looked like for participants during the pandemic. It also explores the economic burdens the pandemic placed on participants and their access to financial and other resources. Lastly, the report describes how JustHouHS participants' housing security changed with COVID.

As the pandemic continues, we hope this report helps New Haven community stakeholders understand the vulnerability of low-income residents who continue to endure, inequitably, the negative consequences of the virus on health and wellbeing.

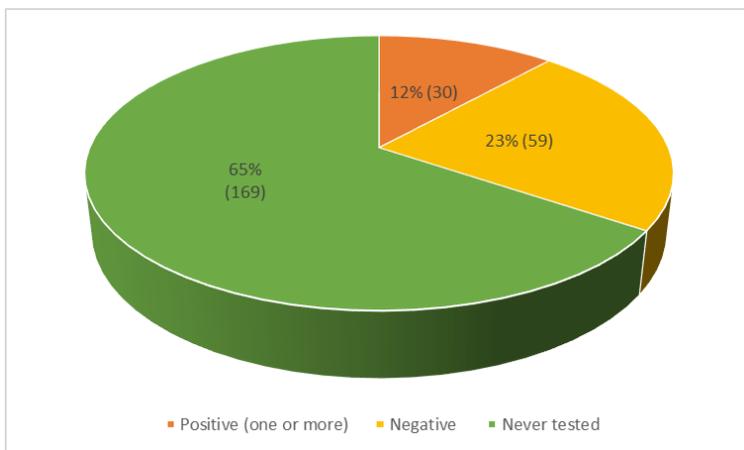
THE SPREAD OF COVID



Many participants expressed concerns about contracting COVID and indicated that they knew someone who had been infected with the virus or that they had been infected themselves.



Participants' COVID Test Results



At the time of the survey, 77% (200) of participants had been tested for COVID at least once. Out of those tested, 15% (30) tested positive for COVID at least once.

Participant views on contracting COVID-19	Agree
I am very worried about getting COVID-19	55% (143)
I am very worried about my friends/family getting COVID-19	67% (172)
I am very worried about giving someone else COVID-19	40% (102)

Many participants were anxious about COVID potentially infecting their friends or family. People were less concerned about giving the virus to someone else.

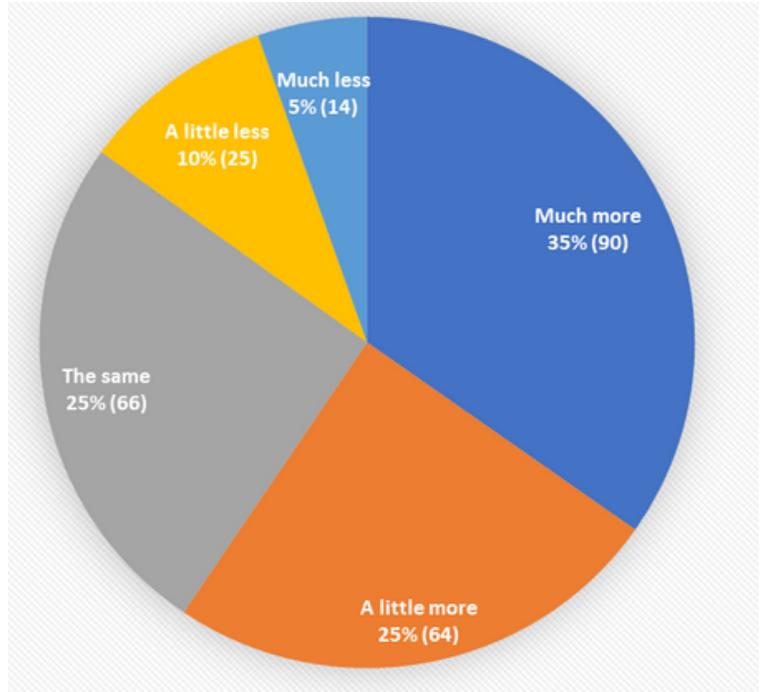
- 31%** 80 participants had an acquaintance or friend contract COVID.
- 17%** 44 participants had a friend or family member die from COVID.
- 4%** 10 participants had someone living with them contract COVID.

SOCIAL DISTANCING & STAYING CONNECTED

Feelings of Isolation

The pandemic has been an overwhelming experience for most Americans. 60% of JustHouHS participants felt more isolated from others during the pandemic than they did before it began. It is likely that social distancing and shutdowns contributed to feelings of isolation.

"Compared to the months before the pandemic, how isolated do you feel from others?"



Staying Connected

Despite the challenges, many stayed connected to key services during the pandemic.

Healthcare



- 102 out of 126 participants who sought medical care for non-COVID-related symptoms reported receiving the care they needed with no delays.
- 23 out of 26 JustHouHS respondents living with HIV reported being able to meet with their provider in person for care during the pandemic.

Food Pantries



- 27%, or 71 participants, reported using food pantries more often since the pandemic began.
- 60%, or 155 participants, made use of food pantries during the pandemic.

CRIMINAL LEGAL INVOLVEMENT DURING COVID

People in prisons and jails faced heightened COVID risk due to congregate living, adding stress to the lives of both incarcerated people and their loved ones. There were also unintended consequences of COVID policies, which caused additional stress. Court cases were delayed, and incarcerated people were put under lock down conditions, unable to have in person visits or call loved ones as frequently. Conditions of probation and parole also changed for some. JustHouHS participants were affected by these changes.

Incarcerated Loved Ones



- 28 participants reported a loved one had been incarcerated at some point since the start of the pandemic.
- 26 people with an incarcerated loved one reported they worried about their loved one's safety.
- 13 participants with a loved one in prison or jail reported they were unable to visit them when they wanted to at some point during the pandemic.

Community Supervision

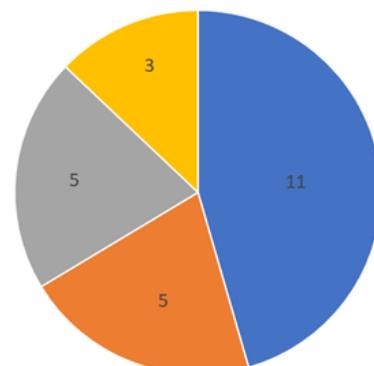


- JustHouHS participants reported their experiences with supervision during the year before they took the survey.
- During this time, 10 participants were on parole and 41 were on probation. Of these, 37 reported meeting with their parole or probation officers (POs).
- 23 reported meeting with their POs by telephone and video at least some of the time. 14 reported meeting with their POs in person only.

Feelings of Safety from COVID During Incarceration

- 24 participants that completed the survey had been incarcerated at some point during the pandemic.
- When it came to safety from COVID during incarceration, most felt unsafe.

"When it comes to COVID, how safe did you feel about your most recent incarceration?"



■ Very unsafe ■ Fairly unsafe ■ Fairly safe ■ Very safe

FINANCIAL BURDEN

JustHouHS participants were financially affected by the pandemic in a number of ways, including loss of or reduced employment, increased expenses, and concern about having enough money.



Worried about Food Supply

42% (109) were strongly or somewhat worried about having enough food due to COVID.



Worried about Loss of Income

46% (119) were strongly or somewhat worried about loss of income if they got sick.



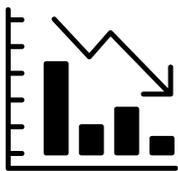
Spending more Money

44% (113) indicated they were spending more money due to the COVID pandemic.



Less Hours at Work

14% (36) reported working fewer hours during the pandemic.



Loss of Income

43% (112) reported a loss of income in their household since March 2020.



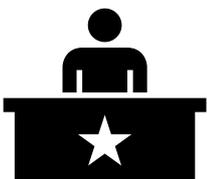
Laid off from Work

21% (54) reported being laid off during the pandemic.



Exiting the Workforce due to COVID

6% (16) reported quitting their job because they were worried about COVID or for another COVID related reason.



Unemployment Benefits

16% (42) indicated someone in their household received unemployment benefits (a higher rate than in previous JustHouHS surveys).

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Government assistance programs were implemented to keep households financially afloat during the pandemic. However, our findings indicate some programs were insufficient or inaccessible. Despite the economic precarity of JustHouHS participants, government benefits did not always reach them during this time of need.

Stimulus Checks



The federal government issued stimulus checks to provide economic relief to individuals and families during the COVID crisis. **Yet at the time of their survey, 37% (95) of respondents indicated they did not receive their first stimulus check. Out of the 95 participants who did not receive their stimulus check, 54% (51) had applied.**

Reasons participants who applied thought they did not receive stimulus checks

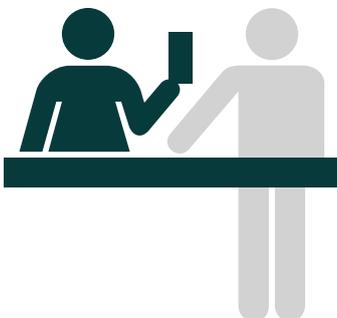
Not eligible due to child support debt	31
Not eligible due to other debt	2
I am still waiting to receive my check	3
I do not know why I did not receive my check	14
Other	1

Difficulty Applying



While most citizens received their check automatically, those without a recent IRS filing due to low or no income had to apply online to receive their stimulus checks. 19% or 49 participants did not apply for their stimulus checks because they did not know how to.

State Resources



Connecticut recognized that many low income tenants were struggling to pay rent during the pandemic. The state funded two temporary rental assistance programs, TRHAP and CASTLE. Unfortunately, **only 14% of participants had heard of TRHAP** before taking the survey, and **less than 10% had applied for CASTLE and/or TRHAP.**

HOUSING

Rent Insecurity

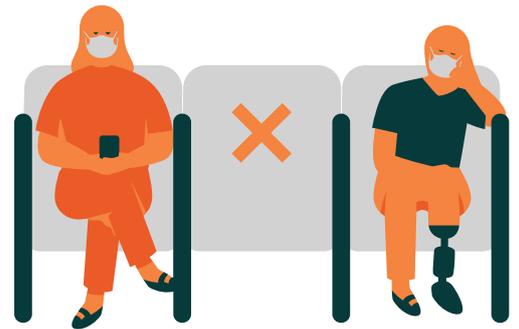


The pandemic made clear that housing is critical for health. Yet the economic impacts of the pandemic disrupted tenants' ability to pay rent.

- 214 participants reported having a landlord.
- Of those with a landlord, 45 participants reported falling behind on rent. They were behind an average of 4 months.
- 26 participants indicated that COVID contributed "a great deal" or "a lot" to their falling behind. With the end of eviction moratoriums, many participants are at great risk for eviction.

Quarantining at Home

Homes were often lacking enough space to social distance and quarantine. Only 96 participants reported having a separate bedroom and bathroom to isolate in if they or another household member contracted COVID.



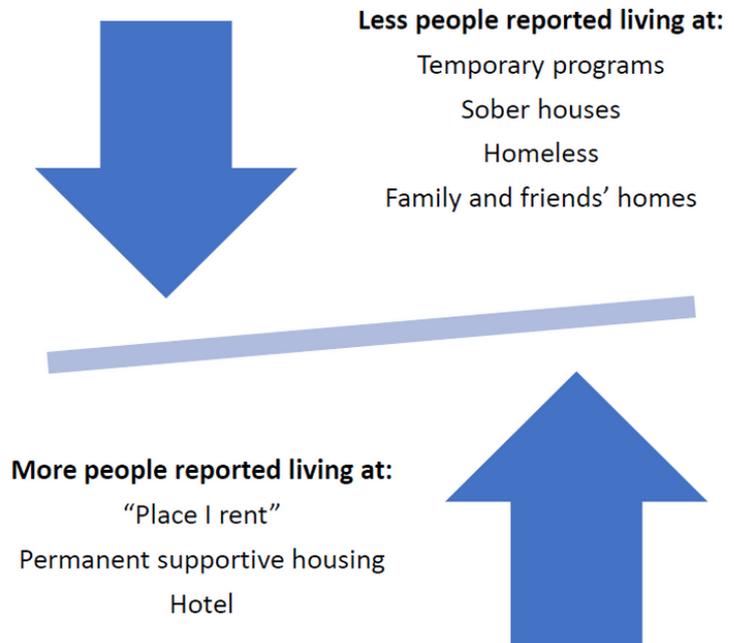
Where JustHouHS Participants Lived

Changes in housing may reflect that:

- Our survey took place virtually, so we may not have been able to reach all homeless participants by phone or mail. Previously, homeless participants could keep in touch by stopping by our office.
- Homeless programs temporarily housed people in hotel rooms, and worked to get people into permanent housing.

Strategies to house people during the pandemic point to the possibility of providing housing to those who need it and can inform future efforts.

Compared to the last survey...



In Conclusion

The pandemic created new vulnerabilities and exacerbated previous ones for low income individuals. State and federal measures to protect American households largely failed to support economically insecure individuals and families. Low income communities need policies that better target their specific needs and address the systemic issues of homelessness, unemployment, financial and housing instability, and criminal legal system injustice. We applaud the intention of policies like the eviction moratorium, stimulus checks, and TRHAP. The implementation of COVID protections, however, sheds light on the inadequacy of many support services to meet the real needs of marginalized communities.

If you are interested in more detailed findings from the COVID JustHouHS survey, or have a particular research question that the dataset may address, please contact us at justhouhs@yale.edu.

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Thanks

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