

JustHouHS COMMUNITY REPORT

FALL 2020



**Life during COVID-19: interviews with
participants in the spring of 2020**

Justice, Housing & Health Study

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 and sexual risk. New Haven is the site of a case study 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. Participants came in every six months for two years to give us their input.

This Community Report

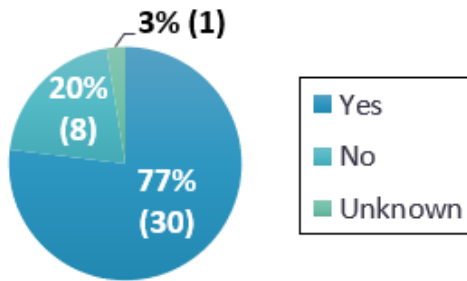
In May and June of 2020, we talked to 39 JustHouHS participants about how their lives had changed since the start of COVID-19. Nearly two thirds (24 people) were Black, four were White, and 11 identified as more than one race and/or ethnicity. Fifteen were women, nearly two thirds were men (24), and all were between 26 to 64-years-old.

This report is a summary of these conversations. For JustHouHS participants, the pandemic has affected every aspect of their lives. Housing challenges, limited incomes, limited access to health care, and criminal justice involvement create vulnerability to the disease itself. The pandemic has also exposed unjust systems that unequally burden low-income Black and Brown communities and affect all aspects of their livelihoods and wellbeing.

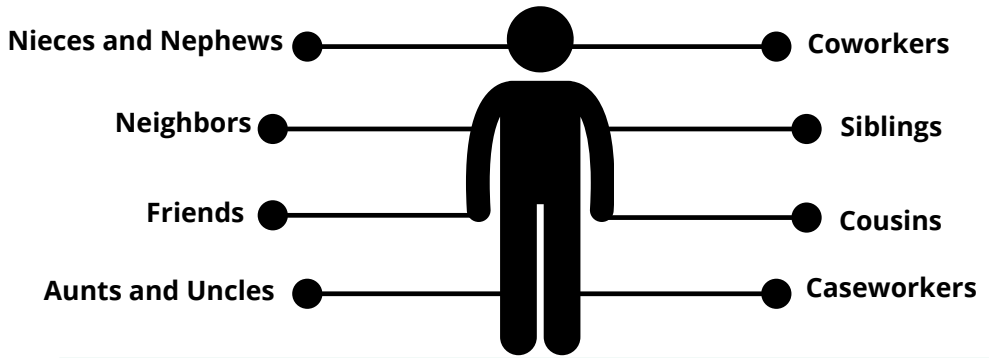
This report starts with an exploration of how COVID-19, as an illness, touched the lives of the people we talked to, as well as those of their friends, families, neighbors, and coworkers. It then provides an overview of the ways COVID-19 has changed participants' access to health care. This section is followed by a summary of the precautions JustHouHS participants took to protect themselves against the virus and the obstacles they faced when trying to do so. Next, there is an examination of the pandemic's effect on the economic situation, housing, and transportation of the participants and, finally, the report concludes with participants' opinions of the government's response to COVID-19. It is our hope that this report will amplify the voices of JustHouHS participants, and that the needs they identify may be considered in developing strategies to lessen the negative effects of the pandemic for low-income people.

COVID-19 in JustHouHS Participants' Social Networks

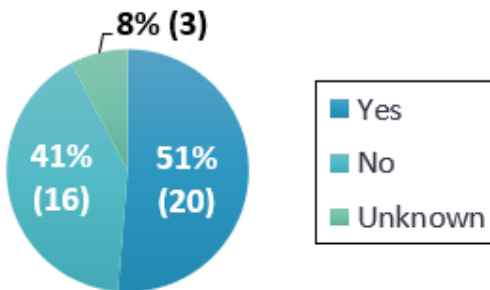
How many JustHouHS interview participants know someone who has had the coronavirus?



Who do JustHouHS participants know with a COVID diagnosis?



How many JustHouHS interview participants know someone who has died of the coronavirus?



"My husband's sister's whole entire – all her kids caught it...one of her children tested positive first and they took him to the hospital...And they sent him home and the whole house contracted the virus, so I'm like, are they intentionally trying to kill people? Because you supposed to keep them in isolation. You can't expect me to keep my whole house under isolation when I have young children running around. You know, they don't understand this."

- Neveah (May 2020)

Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth appointments have replaced most non-procedural in-person appointments - with mixed reception.



Some participants took advantage of medication delivery services due to their safety and convenience, while others relied upon local pharmacies. Community members receiving medication assisted therapy for substance use received take home bottles more frequently. This worked well for some and was challenging for others.



"It saves a lot of money on the medical taxis and the bus fares and the walking and things like that."

- Harriet (May 2020)

"My counselor and my – the mental health worker... We handle our private – you know, we handle our session over the phone... It's cool. You know. We just – you know, I can't get in no deep discussion on some issues I have with it..."

- Ahmad (May 2020)

"I tried MyChart. I tried telehealth. I tried Zoom. I don't know why nothing's working on anything I try, on any device I try it. It makes me want to like, put my head through a damn wall."

- Kaylee (May 2020)

Precautions Taken Against COVID-19



In Everyday Life

JustHouHS participants stated that they wore masks in public and avoided social interactions outside of the home. Other precautions participants took included washing hands, using hand sanitizer, wearing gloves, disinfecting mail and groceries, and cleaning their homes. Some reported avoiding public transportation altogether.



"We're stacked up with all kinds of cleaning supplies, all kinds of bleaches, stuff to sanitize the bathrooms and stuff with. We clean the bathrooms five times a day. Every time we clean, we got two boxes of gloves, we wipe down the doors, the doorknob, keep everything sanitized."
- Addison (June 2020)



"I was kind of frightened and worried and I - my house is already clean, but I really bleached it down." - Trinity (May 2020)



"I have to go grocery stores, but I put a mask and gloves on and wash my hands, you know, when I get home and stuff, so. And, you know, I go to the Elm Market or walk to Ferraro's. I don't take the bus. That's one thing that's changed. I haven't been on a bus in - since the beginning of this thing ..." - Sammy (May 2020)



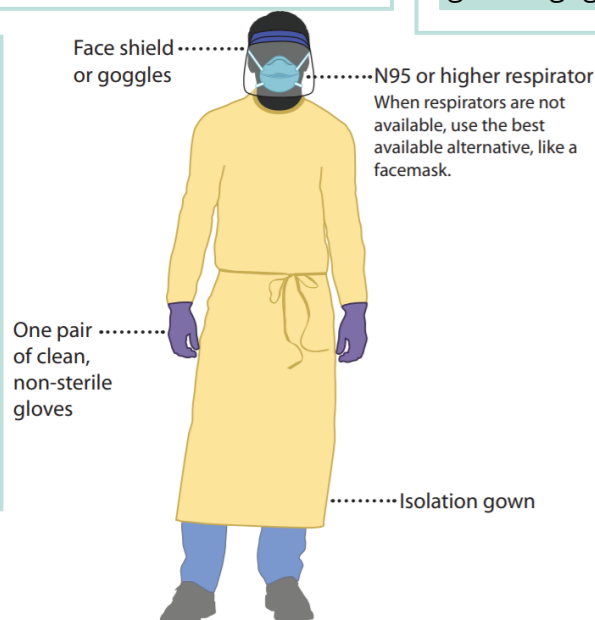
As Essential Workers

JustHouHS participants who are essential workers, many of whom work in health care, reported having a lack of adequate protective gear in the workplace. In addition, many described the additional precautions that they took due to their proximity to COVID-19 at work.

"If you want me to be honest, sometimes we have proper PPE, sometimes we don't. Like right now we don't have too many gowns, so we're using kitchen aprons and, um, the nightgowns from the hospitals..." - Leah, CNA (May 2020)

"They give us...the N-E 95s now, the thinner ones. They give us those twice a week and we have one face shield that we have and then they give us goggles." - Leah, CNA (May 2020)

"It's like a whole procedure. I was really exhausted when I was working, because then when I come home I have to strip. I have to wash my clothes immediately. I have to take a shower. I have to wipe the walls down, the railing. I have to do my shoes." - Rayna, CNA (May 2020)



"And, you know, they barely give her a mask. You know, she has to go get her own mask or wear the same mask that they give her for two weeks, and I think that's more unsanitary than anything...You know, you can't keep re - those masks are never used to - were never made to be reusable." - Neveah (May 2020), talking about her sister who works as a receptionist at a hospital

Social Distancing: "This really changed America"

- Brandon (May 2020)

With millions across the US entering different forms of self-isolation since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing has had various effects on community members. Strict social distancing measures have taken a toll on individuals' mental health and community connections, forcing them to construct new - and often drastically different - normals in the face of the pandemic.



"I could go to New Haven, I could go to Meriden, I could go to all the surrounding city areas, but it's like I choose not to 'cause I don't want to get sick. You know? Like, I take the basic precautions, but it's still weighing on my mental health. I ain't gonna lie. Nobody wants to feel like they're entrapped."
- Carlos (May 2020)



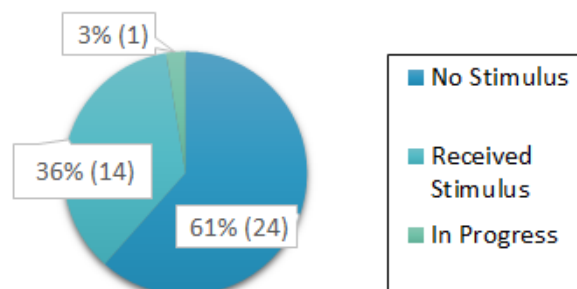
"Well I mean I do miss, you know, my usually weekly [mental health support] group, 'cause that's really a real mainstay and it's a lot of fun. So I mean that's - it's hard to go without that." - Sammy (May 2020)



"It's tough keeping up with being a - teaching via online learning and now I'm wearing the hat of school administrator." - Kaylee regarding her daughter's remote learning (May 2020)

Did the CARES Act stimulus find its way to JustHouHS interview participants?

Of the 39 participants interviewed, 24 reported not receiving their stimulus at the time of their interview in May or June. Many participants cited arrears & child support as the reasons they did not receive it. Others were not sure why they had not received it and mentioned trouble accessing the online portal and technological barriers.



“I didn't get any stimulus. I don't think that's right at all because there's a lot of people out here that owe child support, and they shouldn't take it because they owe child support, because of this Covid-19.”
- Camilla (May 2020)



“As far as the stimulus goes, it seems like they're finding reasons not to give them.”
- Harriet (May 2020)

“When I got my stimulus...I just went grocery shopping and stocked up on stuff and...and then I...helped my mom out, gave her a few dollars. And then it was her birthday. So I - me and my sister went half on getting her hair done and...I bought her an outfit and then I gave her a \$50.00 gift card to Macy's. And then the rest I just paid bills and that type of stuff.”
- Malik (May 2020)

Housing, COVID-19 & Quarantine

"So COVID, when it hit initially was pretty hectic for me 'cause I was at home all day with my abuser, so I was getting beat on a lot." - *Leah (May 2020)*

For many, quarantine meant social isolation was difficult emotionally, and, in some instances put respondents in physical danger.

"I feel like I'm back in prison." - *Carlos (May 2020)*

"I have no money at all...My work's not opening. I still haven't got my unemployment check...I spoke to somebody and they said they can't evict you...But it's still like money I'm gonna owe, money I don't have...I don't want to be on the street." - *Cora (May 2020)*

The pandemic took its toll economically. New unemployment caused stress about paying the rent and created tension in relationships.

"It's painful because it's like I feel like I'm putting all the pressure on her, you know, 'cause I have no steady income right now and everything is falling on her shoulders. So it just sucks." *Elijah (May 2020), on being unemployed and living with his girlfriend*

"I told her with this pandemic, you know, with the virus, this mess going on, I just don't like the fact that she travels from here...then over there at [another] house...I don't want that mess in here and I don't want nothing on my kids." - *Lily (May 2020), on living with her relative during the pandemic*

Some JustHouHS participants were homeless, or residence was spread over multiple addresses for some, complicating quarantine.

JustHouHS participants provided housing to friends and loved ones during the pandemic to keep them safe.

"I try not to let it bother me. I'm like he's gonna go out. He's gonna interact with people. It's like there's so many ways you can get it." - *Johnny (May 2020), speaking about his roommate*

Sharing living spaces with neighbors and roommates sometimes made it difficult for JustHouHS participants to socially distance.

"It was just as the epidemic was going on. I had a friend that had to stay with me for a minute because of the simple fact that I didn't want him in the street during that period of time." - *Isaiah (June 2020)*



Public Transportation in a Pandemic...

Participants shared that it was a relief that the buses were free but expressed concern about a lack of precautions and enforcement of rules on CT Transit buses in and around New Haven. Ridership was not limited and there were no physical barriers on the buses (such as tape) to guide social distancing. Eight participants stopped using the bus during this time. Some switched to walking to work and/or to get groceries while others saved to pay for ride shares or arranged for rides from family and friends.

"The driver's blocked from everyone, but everyone else can sit on top of each other... I don't know why they don't just tape off every other seat or every two seats for the six foot distance, but what do I know. I'm just a peasant."
- Kaylee (May 2020)



"You know, this lady yesterday on the bus, she was just talking and talking without her mask, and I have to leave to get off the bus. It was seven of us that got off the bus."
- Tyler (May 2020)

"I'm scared to ride the bus!"
- Trinity (May 2020)

JustHouHS Participants' Opinions on the Government's Response to COVID-19



JustHouHS participants believe the federal government cares more about money than human lives.

"It's unfortunate that we have to pay taxes for a government that's trying to kill us all"
- Johnny (May 2020)



JustHouHS participants believe the federal government is withholding information from Americans.

"They're not giving us enough information, man. They're not giving us enough information about what's - what it is..." - Ahmad (May 2020)



JustHouHS participants believed May 20th was too early to re-open Connecticut.

"I think that it's too soon because people are still getting sick. It is still cases and our health is more important than things opening back up, honestly and people out of work and things like that. But nobody want to die. I know I don't. I know you don't." - Desiree (May 2020)



JustHouHS participants believe the federal government's response to COVID-19 was extraordinarily insufficient for low-income Americans.

"So, sending somebody, you know, \$1,200, you know, that - what is that? That's not no money..." - Neveah (May 2020)



In general, JustHouHS participants approved of the local government's response.

"Yeah. I mean I think, you know, New Haven's doing really good and, you know, Governor Lamont's doing fine." - Sammy (May 2020)

Big News

We are excited to announce that we received funding to conduct another survey this fall. We can send you a link to the new survey so that you can take it from home. If you need support to take the survey, we can help you over the phone. We will figure it out together – we are here for you. Please text us if your contact information has changed: 475-209-3506 or email us: justhouhs@gmail.com. If you still have your red payment card, please hold on to it for payment. If you have lost it – we can mail you a new one. We look forward to being in touch soon!

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Thank You

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