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The True Costs of the Pandemic: An Analysis of the Disparities of Our Lived Experiences





The True Costs of the Pandemic: An Analysis of the Disparities of Our Lived Experiences

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Executive Summary

In March 2020, our world changed. Our region, and the country as a whole, responded to the increasing spread of the coronavirus through a series of extended shutdowns that closed schools, businesses, and services. Some households and families were able to transition to a virtual environment effectively, but others faced significant challenges outside of their control.

Using data from the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey (Pulse Survey), Venture Philanthropy Partners+Raise DC (VPP+Raise DC) examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Greater Washington region¹, with a particular emphasis on households with children and households headed by young adults (18-24 year olds). The U.S. Census created and administered the Pulse Survey in partnership with 13 other federal agencies to determine how households were affected by COVID-19. Designed as a quick turnaround data product, the Pulse Survey was administered online through invitations every two weeks. The data was made publicly available shortly thereafter to gain a real-time view of how the pandemic changed social and economic conditions for households. The Pulse Survey was first administered on April 23, 2020, and this analysis includes data collected through March 1, 2021.

There have been many analyses and stories on the overall effect of the pandemic on residents of the Greater Washington region. However, this report focuses entirely on how the pandemic has substantially affected the lives of families in our region and households headed by young adults. These are populations that are often glossed over or excluded in discussions around the pandemic. The experiences of youth, families, and young adults need to be considered and elevated as part of current pandemic dialogue.

VPP+Raise DC focused on households with children (which we will refer to as families) and households headed by 18-24-year olds because these household environments greatly shape the lives of youth and young adults in the region. Efforts to improve life outcomes for children experiencing conditions worsened by the pandemic will need to include strategies to address these household conditions.

Through our analysis, we found that African American and Latinx households with children in the Greater Washington Region have faced far greater challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic than White households in the region. These households were already facing significant challenges before the pandemic, but the past 18 months have exacerbated the symptoms of persistent systemic inequities for certain households.

In our analysis, we also examined the challenges experienced by Asian and Pacific Islander households with children throughout the region during the pandemic. However, in most cases, the findings for Asian and Pacific Islander households with children mirrored those of White households with children. VPP+Raise DC recognizes that the Asian and Pacific Islander populations are not monolithic, and that thousands of Asian and Pacific

¹ For the purposes of this report, we used the U.S. Census Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as a proxy for the Greater Washington Region. The Washington MSA includes all of the following: District of Columbia; Maryland Counties: Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, Prince George s; Virginia Counties: Arlington, Clarke, Culpepper, Fairfax, Fauquier, King George, Loudoun, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Warren; Virginia Cities: Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Manassas, Manassas Park; West Virginia Counties: Berkeley, Jefferson.

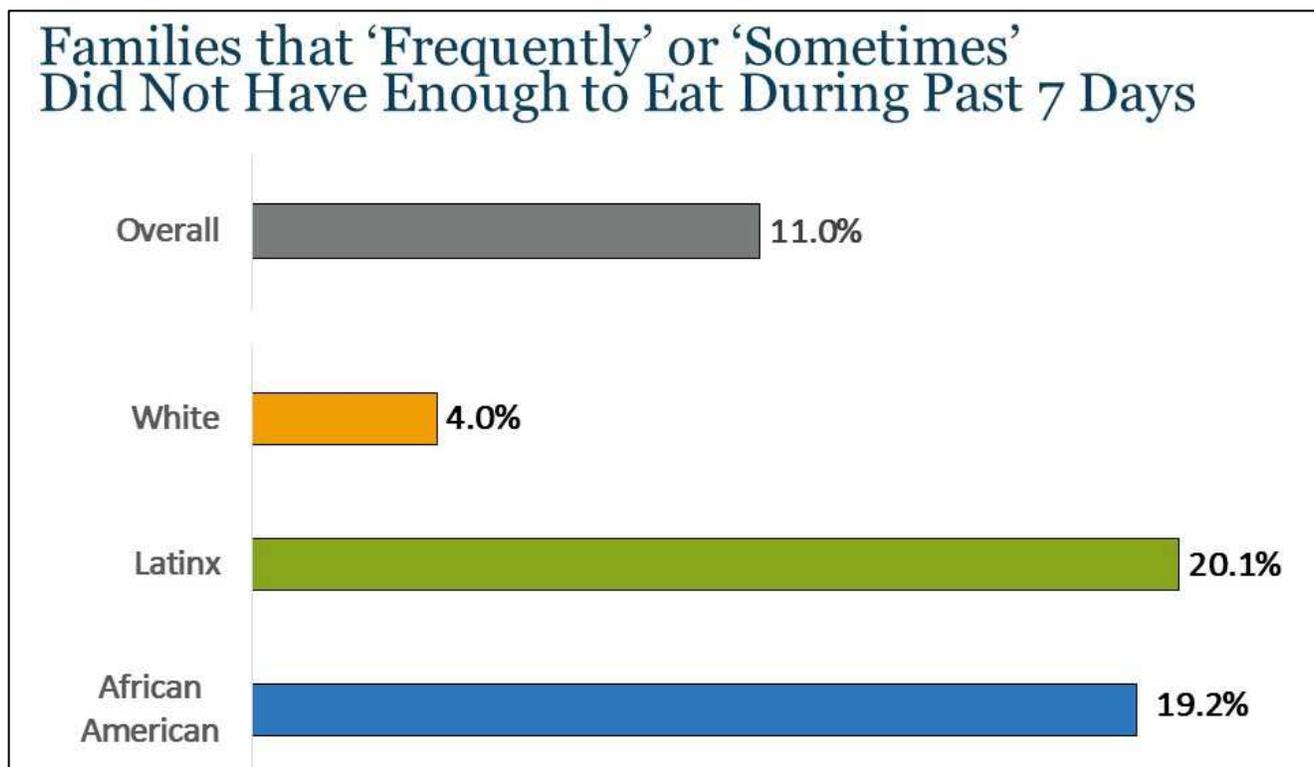


Islander families in the region are likely facing challenges similar to African American and Latinx families. In this report, we share data for Asian and Pacific Islander households with children when it differs by more than 3 percentage points when compared to White households.

Findings

Unpacking and detangling the interrelated challenges that existed for lower-income households was a difficult task before the pandemic. However, the pandemic has further exacerbated those challenges in multiple ways, particularly for families and households with children. Many of the findings in this section are mutually reinforcing and speak to the ever-growing challenges that families in the region will continue to face due to the pandemic.

With several news stories focusing on hunger and food insecurity during the pandemic, we began our examination focusing on how households with children dealt with food-related issues. We found that 11 percent of all households with children in the region reported that they sometimes or frequently did not have enough to eat during the 7 days prior to responding to the Pulse Survey.

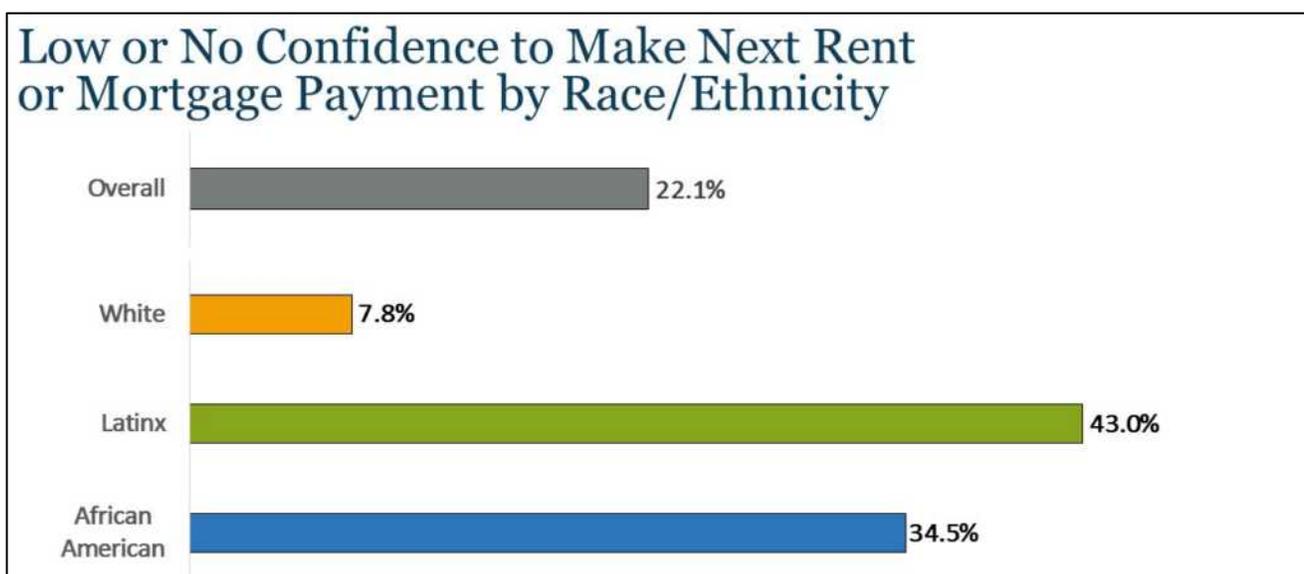


However, there was great variation among subgroups of households with children. Twenty percent of Latinx households with children, and 19 percent of African American households with children, reported some level of food insecurity in our region. In comparison, only 4 percent of White households with children reported some level of food insecurity during the 7 days before completing the Pulse Survey. Put another way, 1 out of



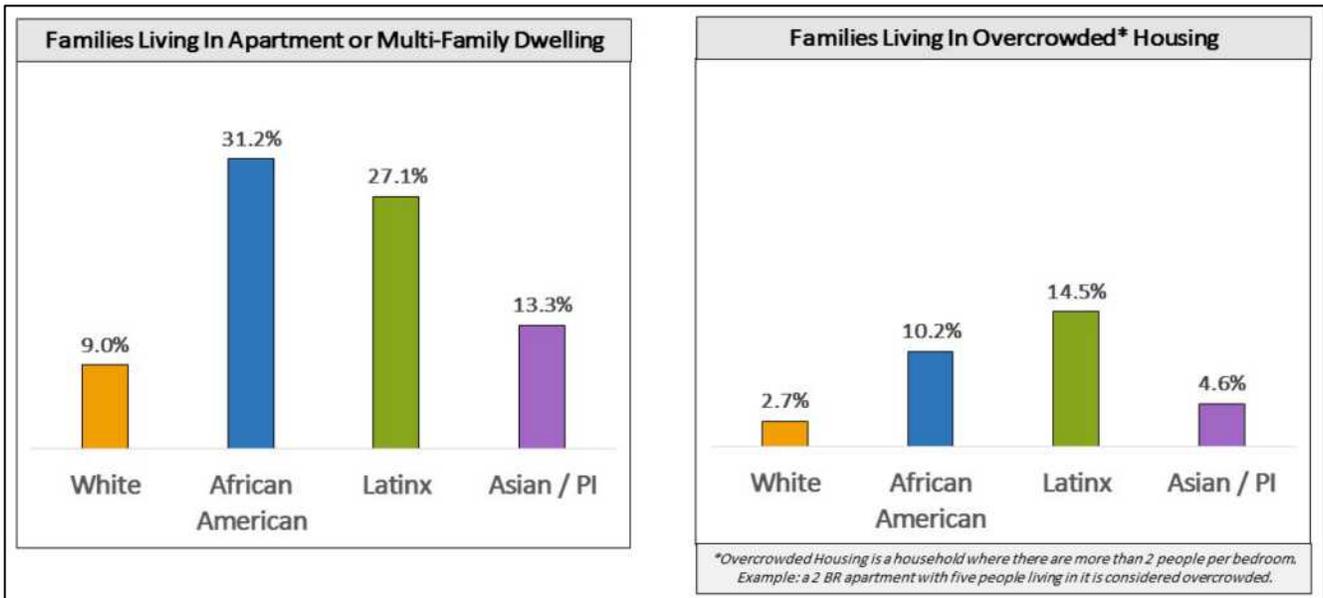
every 5 Latinx and African American households with children in the region reported some level of food insecurity during the pandemic compared to 1 out of every 25 White households with children. In addition to food insecurity, many families dealt with challenges related to their housing. These challenges included struggling to maintain their housing (by staying current with rent and mortgage payments) and the stress of living in crowded housing conditions during a pandemic with a highly contagious virus.

For all households with children in the region, 22 percent reported that they had low or no confidence in their ability to make their next rent or mortgage payment. However, there were differences by race/ethnicity of the respondents. Forty three percent of Latinx households with children in the region reported had low or no confidence in their ability to make their next rent or mortgage payment, as did 35 percent of African American households with children. In comparison, only 8 percent of White households with children in the region reported low or no confidence in their ability to make their next rent or mortgage payment.

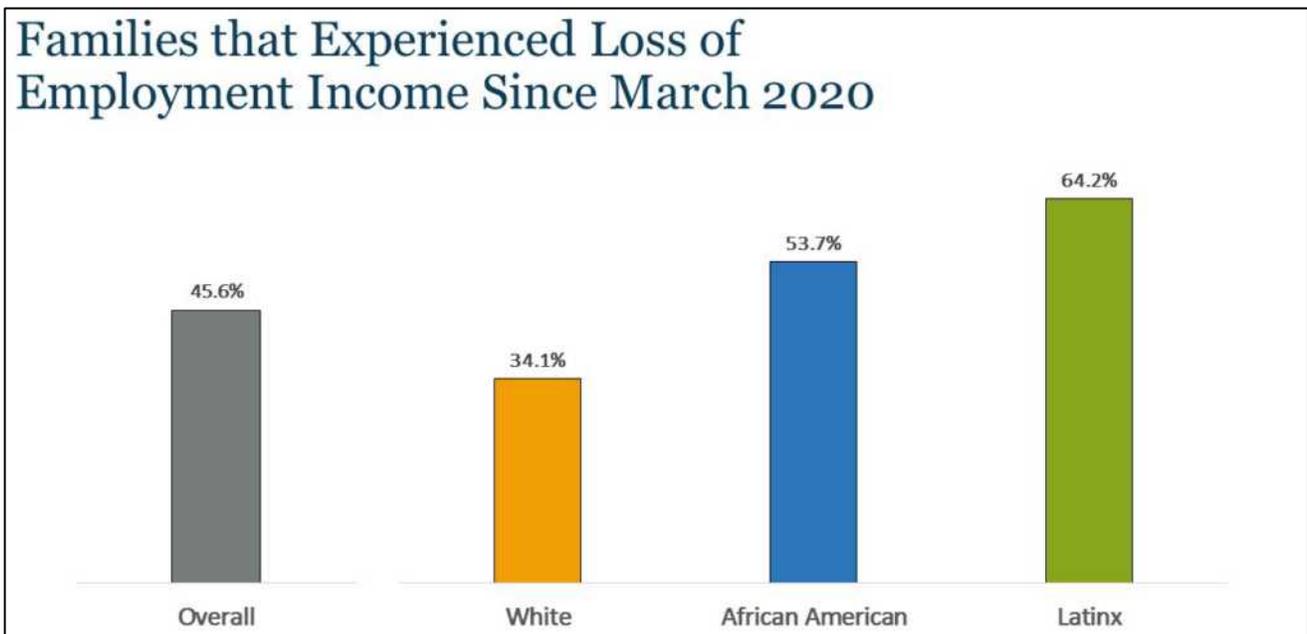


Even in instances when families could make their rent or mortgage payments, the nature of their housing situation made it more likely that they were directly (or indirectly) exposed to COVID-19. African American and Latinx households with children were more likely to live in apartments or group housing and were more likely to live in overcrowded housing conditions than White households with children. Both of these conditions created environments where African American and Latinx families were more likely to be around others on a consistent basis, which also increased their chances of exposure to COVID-19.

A total of 31 percent of African American households with children in the region lived in an apartment or multi-family dwelling during the pandemic, as did 27 percent of Latinx households with children. In contrast, only 9 percent of White households with children in the region lived in an apartment or multi-family dwelling. Similarly, 15 percent of Latinx households with children in the region reported living in an overcrowded housing situation, as did 10 percent of African American households with children. This compares to 3 percent of White households with children in the region living in an overcrowded housing situation.



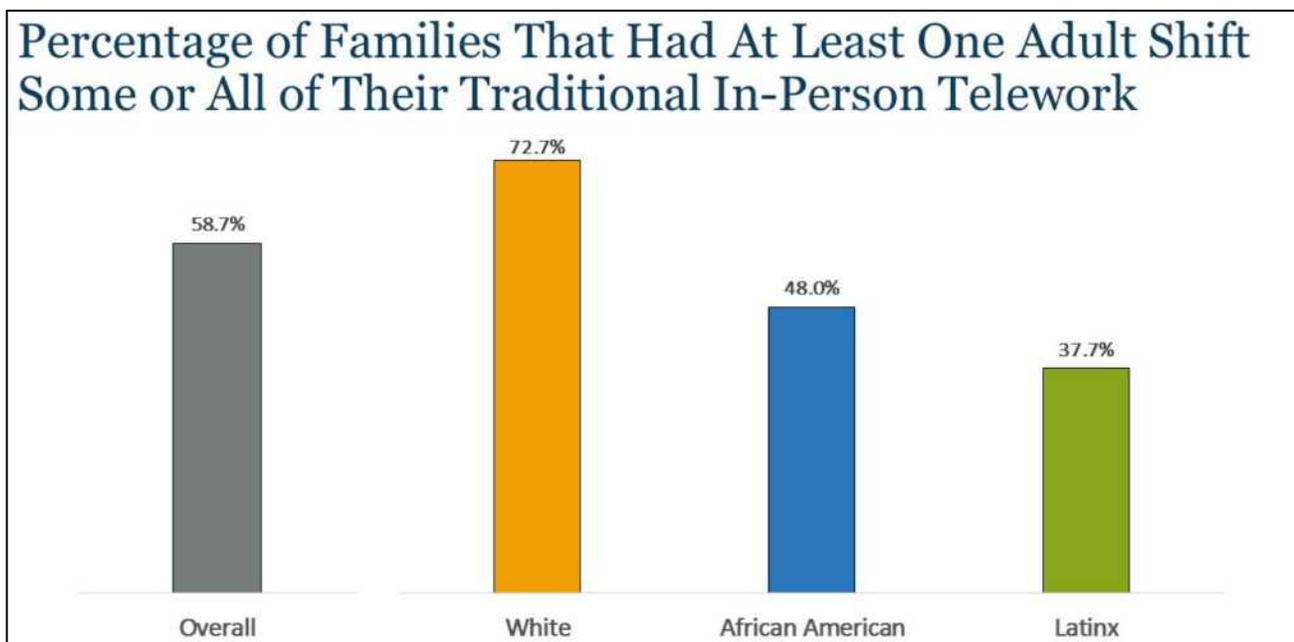
Many of the challenges that families in the region faced during the pandemic were rooted in losses of employment income. For all households with children in the region, 46 percent experienced some loss of employment income during the pandemic. However, 64 percent of Latinx households with children in the region experienced a loss of employment income during the pandemic, as did 54 percent of African American households with children. In contrast, 34 percent of White households in the region with children experienced a loss of employment income during the pandemic. In addition, half (50 percent) of the region's households headed by 18-24 year olds experienced a loss of employment income during the pandemic.





In many cases, this loss of employment income during the pandemic was driven by community shutdowns early in the pandemic. These shutdowns severely limited (or eliminated) many employment opportunities that were based on in-person interactions. Certain families could easily transition to virtual or remote work, but those that worked in retail or construction often struggled.

During the pandemic, 59 percent of households in the region with children had at least one adult shift some or all of their traditional in-person work to telework due to the pandemic. For White households in the region with children, 73 percent had at least one of the adults in the household shift to telework. In contrast, only 38 percent of Latinx households in the region with children had an adult in the household transition from traditional in-person work to telework during the pandemic. In comparison, 48 percent of African American households in the region with children had an adult transition to telework.

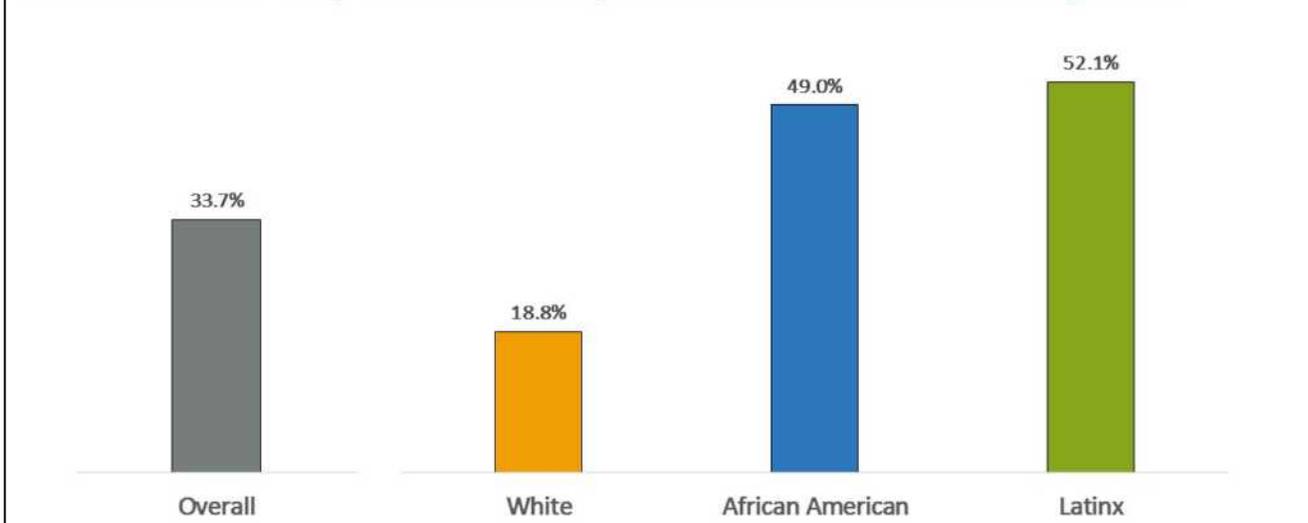


Losses of income and limited ability to transition employment to telework likely led to decreased confidence in a household's ability to cover common household expenses (such as food, rent, car payments, student loan payments, or medical expenses). During the pandemic, 34 percent of households in the region with children reported that they found it somewhat difficult or very difficult to pay for common household expenses over the preceding seven days.

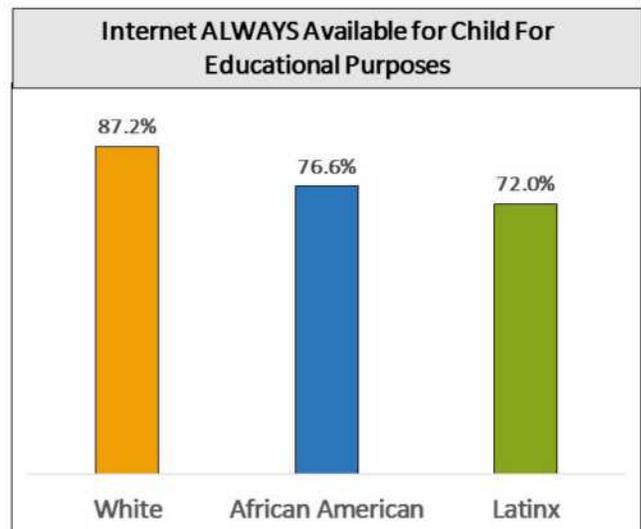
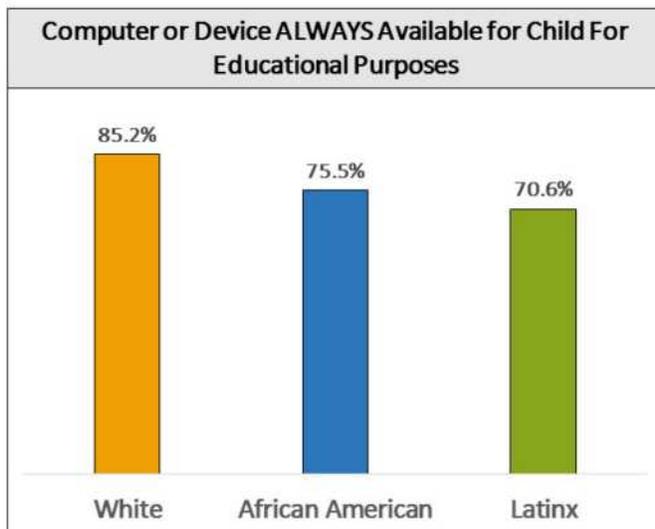
However, responses varied by race/ethnicity, with 52 percent of Latinx households in the region with children reporting difficulty paying for common household expenses during the previous seven days, with 49 percent of African American households with children reporting the same. This compares to 19 percent of White households in the region with children reporting difficulty paying for common household expenses during the previous seven days.



Percentage of Families Reporting Over Previous 7 Days They Found it 'Somewhat' or 'Very' Difficult to Pay for Common Household Expenses



However, adults were not the only ones that struggled to switch to a virtual environment. Many children in the region were forced to shift their learning to online spaces during the pandemic. Some children struggled with this transition due to limited access to devices and consistent internet. Furthermore, even in instances where devices and internet access were provided to students (through school or government programs), the lack of supportive guidance to parents on how to use the devices for virtual learning limited their utility. The ability for children to successfully transition to remote learning also varied across different race and ethnic groups during the pandemic. While most children in the region always had consistent access to a computer or device and an internet connection for educational purposes, many others did not despite efforts by local governments and school systems.

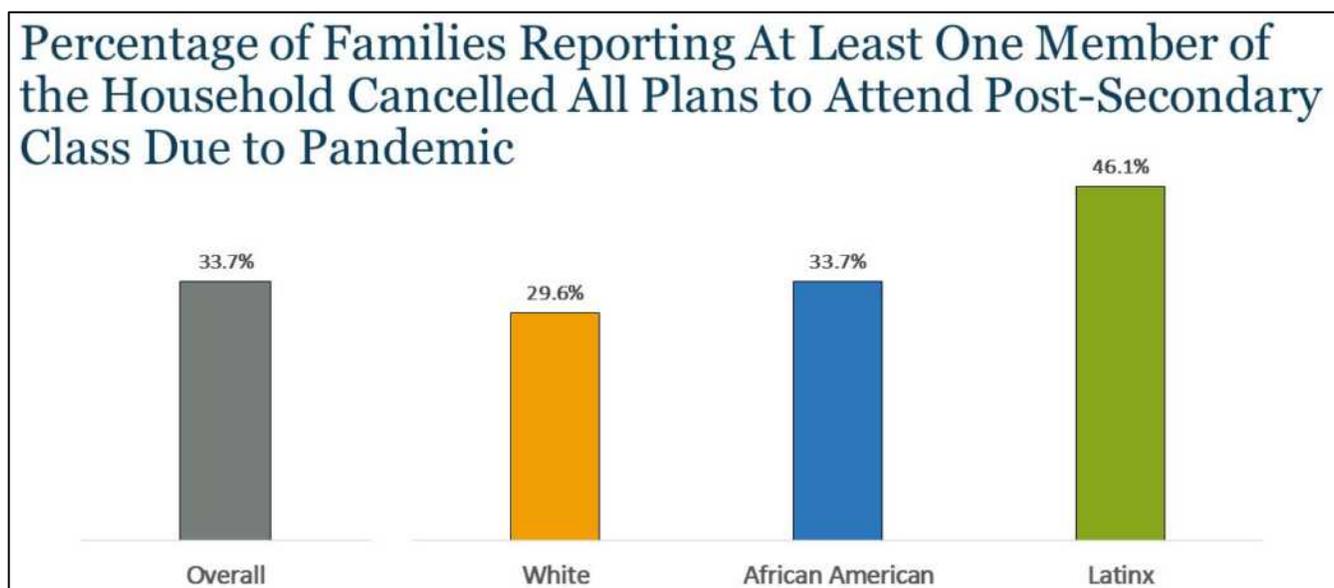




Only 71 percent of Latinx households in the region with children had a computer or device always available for a child for educational purposes. With 76 percent of African American households with children reporting the same. This compares to 85 percent of White households in the region with children reporting they always had a computer or device available for a child for educational purposes.

Similarly, there were differences in consistent and dedicated internet access for children to complete educational activities. Only 72 percent of Latinx households (and 77 percent of African American households) in the region reported having internet access always available for children for educational purposes. In contrast, 87 percent of White households in the region with children always had internet access for children for educational purposes.

The pandemic also led to many canceling plans to take post-secondary classes. Overall, 34 percent of households in the region with children reported having at least one member of the household canceling all plans to attend post-secondary classes. A total of 46 percent of Latinx households in the region with children reported a family member canceling post-secondary classes, with 34 percent of African American households in the region with children reporting the same. In contrast, only 30 percent of White households reported having at least one member of the household canceling all plans to attend post-secondary classes.



These findings point to the complex nature of how certain Latinx and African American families in the Greater Washington region experienced the pandemic. For some families, losses of employment income led to struggles with paying rent, finding food, and paying for other household expenses. This exacerbated other challenges, such as living in dense or overcrowded housing conditions, which made it more likely that these families were exposed to COVID-19.

The pandemic-related shutdowns also forced children into remote learning where some families did not have consistent access to computing devices or internet, which likely led to disconnection and children falling behind in their learning. Furthermore, the pandemic forced family members to cancel plans for post-secondary education designed to improve their economic situation in the future.



Families who lost the ability to obtain post-secondary education will find it more challenging to obtain stable employment and consistent income. This will make it more difficult in the future to pay for housing and food, potentially lengthening the challenges that children will have to overcome during their lives.

Limitations of the Analysis and the Data

VPP+Raise DC understands that there are several substantial limitations and caveats to these findings and the underlying data. The most substantial limitation exists with the race/ethnicity data related to the Pulse Survey. Since the Pulse Survey only asked the respondent (the person completing the survey) about their race/ethnicity, VPP+Raise DC had to make assumptions about the racial and ethnic composition of the household. We assumed that the entire household was the same race/ethnicity as the respondent and recognized that this assumption creates an inherent flaw in the data by minimizing the presence of multi-racial and multi-ethnic families. However, given the nature of the Pulse Survey and how it was administered, we believe that this was the only way we could present data broken out by race/ethnicity.

In addition, VPP+Raise DC attempted to determine how the pandemic affected households headed by 18-24 year olds using the Pulse Survey data. Unfortunately, the number of these types of households in the Pulse Survey data set was very low. In most cases, we could not generate reliable estimates for this group by race/ethnicity.

Finally, it is important to point out that U.S. Census considers the Pulse Survey as an experimental data product, meaning that it does not (as of now) meet the statistical confidence thresholds for other Census data sets. While the data may not be as representative and comprehensive as possible, the rapid availability of findings related to the pandemic provides us with the opportunity to understand trends in regional households quickly.

Conclusion

Our youth do not exist in isolation – they live in households, families, and neighborhoods that support and influence them. Focusing solely on youth outcomes and conditions can provide insight into how well they will succeed. However, it only provides one piece of the larger picture. To fully understand and appreciate the youth experience and properly design effective interventions, a complete understanding of the challenges their families, households, and communities face is required. This report was prepared to examine how children and their families experienced the pandemic and how many families will continue to struggle with its effects long after it ends. For many families, the end of the pandemic will not signal a return to normal rather, it will be the start of a much more difficult journey.

The effects of COVID-19 related shutdowns have resulted in an estimated 200,000 youth removed from formal academic instruction or the workforce – an estimated 25 percent increase over pre-pandemic numbers. To combat this, VPP+Raise DC strives to ensure that every young person in the region has access to quality health care, post-secondary education, and meaningful career opportunities. We will continue to align partners, resources, and actions to advance equity so that every child in our region can realize their full potential faster. We must do more, be bolder, and act faster to make the changes needed, particularly for our most vulnerable youth and families.



Recommended Resources

The following are additional resources that provide further context into and deeper examination of what has been summarized in this report.

U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey Homepage:

<https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products/household-pulse-survey.html>

U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey Technical Documentation:

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/technical-documentation.html>

U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey Instruments Used:

<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/technical-documentation/hhp/household-pulse-survey-questionnaire-week1-5.pdf>

https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/technical-documentation/hhp/2020_COVID-19_Household_Pulse_Survey-Week-6_English.pdf

https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/technical-documentation/hhp/Phase_1_Questionnaire_06_11_20_English.pdf

https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/technical-documentation/hhp/Phase_2_Questionnaire_11_2_20_Updated_English.pdf



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