

COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Household Employment and Income

Updated July 29, 2020

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected households in numerous ways, including shuttering business and schools, resulting in an economic recession and loss of employment income. An [experimental U.S. Census Bureau household survey](#) has been fielded each week since late April to track the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on households. This Insight provides some data from that survey, as well as links to research on the pandemic-induced recession's effects on households and policy responses to them.

Not Working for Reasons Related to COVID-19

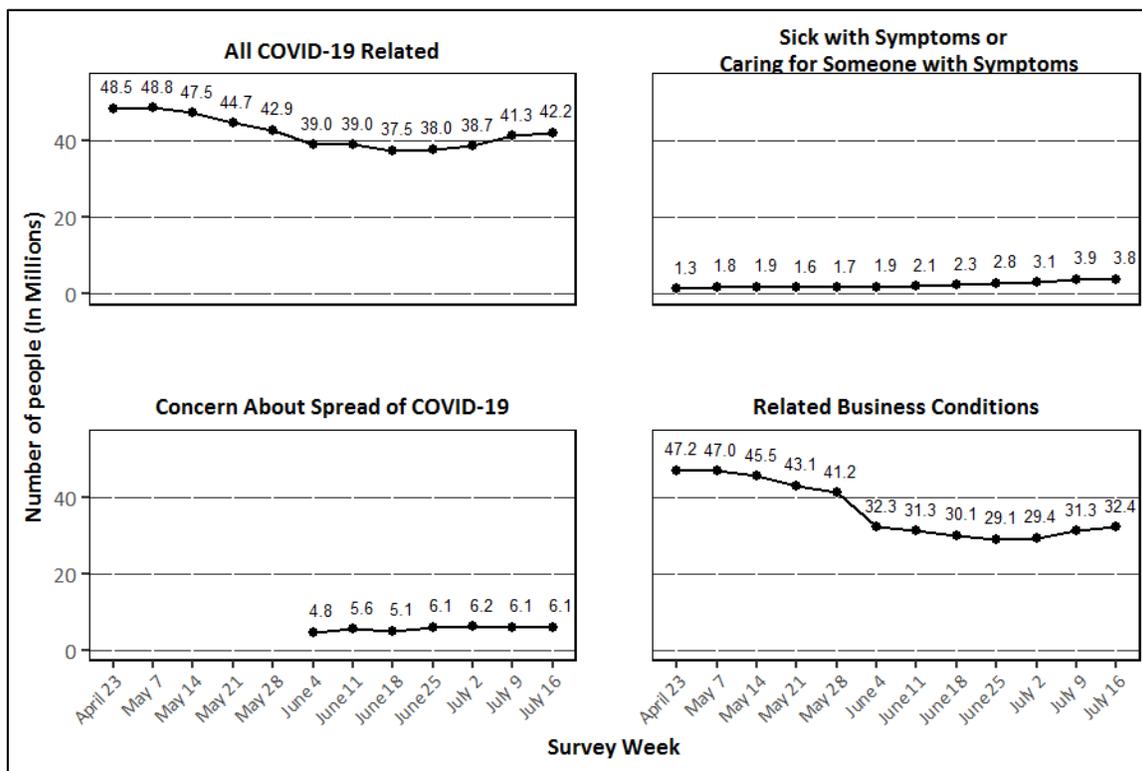
The Census survey asked respondents who were not working the week of the survey the reason they did not work, with several of the reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a different survey from that used to produce the regular monthly labor force statistics (employment and unemployment), which does not ask questions that are specific to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Figure 1** shows that the estimated number of people who reported not working for COVID-19-related reasons peaked during the week of May 7, 2020, at 48.8 million, and declined to 37.5 million during the week of June 18. The decline reversed in early July. For the week of July 16, a total of 42.2 million persons reported not working for COVID-19-related reasons. The largest group are those not working because of COVID-19's effect on business conditions (furloughs, layoffs, businesses closed).

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Figure I. Number of Adults Not Working for COVID-19-Related Reasons
In Millions



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS) tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse survey.

Notes: The reduction of those selecting any of the reasons comprising “related business conditions” for the week of June 4 coincided with the introduction of a new option for people to report that they were not working due to concern about the spread of COVID-19 (catch or spread COVID-19).

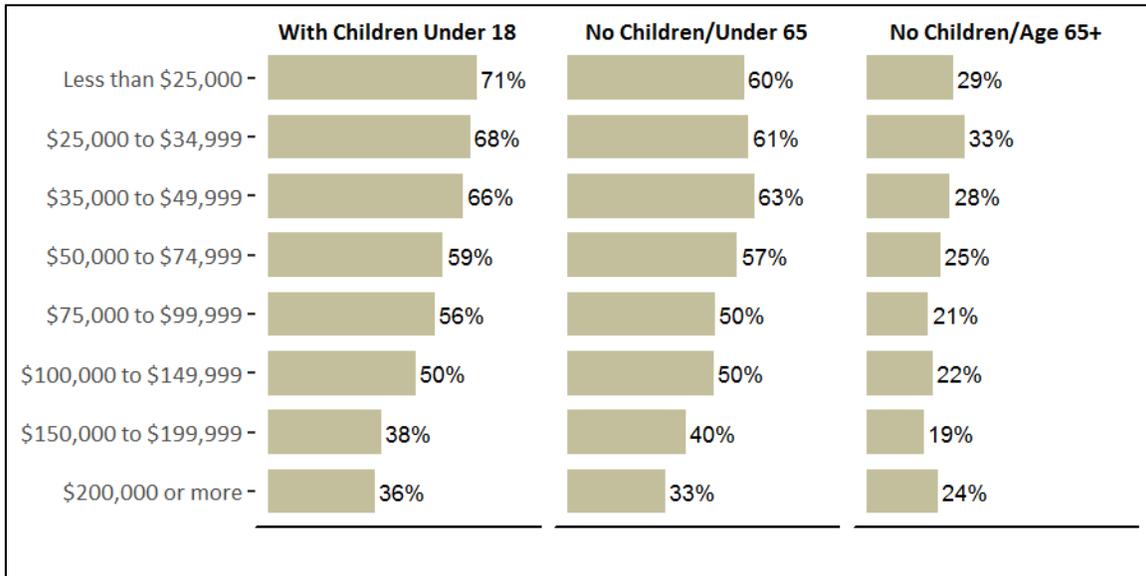
In addition, many individuals responded they were not working in order to attend to children not in care or in school. (The survey did not ask about lack of available child care tied to COVID-19. Many parents have reported that their child’s [school](#) or [child care facility](#) has closed since the start of the pandemic.)

Loss of Employment Income

The Census survey asked respondents whether they or other members of their household experienced a loss in employment income since March 13, 2020. Estimates from the survey find that through mid-July 2020, half of all adults (aged 18 and older) lived in a household that has lost some employment income since March 2020. Additionally, this income loss has disproportionately affected those who were in households that had lower income in 2019 or who were not white or who were Hispanic.

Figure 2 shows the percent of adults living in households that lost employment income between mid-March 2020 and mid-July 2020, by their 2019 household income and family type. Among all family types—but particularly among families with children—those who lived in households with lower 2019 incomes were more likely to lose employment income since March. At the same time, employment income loss was widespread and occurred in all income categories. Some aged individuals also lived in households that lost employment income, though rates among this group were lower than those for adults living with children or who were under age 65 and not living with children.

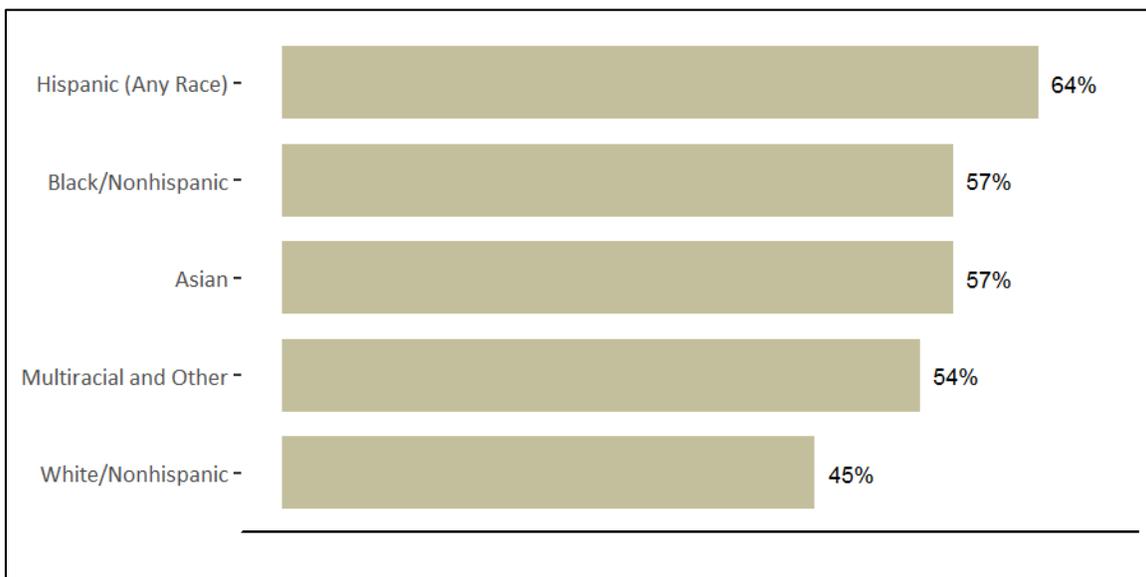
Figure 2. Percentage of Adults in Households That Lost Employment Income Since March 2020, by 2019 Income Category



Source: CRS tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse survey for the week of July 16.

Figure 3 shows that, as of mid-July 2020, 64% of Hispanic persons and 57% of both black Non-Hispanic and Asian adults were in households that lost some employment income over the four-month period. The only group with a household income loss rate of less than 50% was Non-Hispanic whites.

Figure 3. Percentage of Adults in Households That Lost Employment Income Since March 2020, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: CRS tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse survey for the week of July 16.

Policies Offsetting Employment Income Losses

Although there are policies in place that kick in during periods of economic loss (i.e., [automatic stabilizers](#)), in March 2020, enacted legislation provided for temporary, ad-hoc enhancements of income maintenance policies. These included the following:

- [Two temporary paid leave entitlements](#) for some workers, which may be used for certain COVID-19-related needs, expiring at the end of 2020.
- [Enhanced unemployment insurance \(UI\)](#), including providing an extra \$600 in weekly benefits, expanding benefits to certain groups who usually do not qualify, and providing an extra 13 weeks of benefits. The extra \$600 in benefits expired July 25, 2020, with other provisions expiring at the end of 2020.
- Help for [small businesses](#), including a program (Paycheck Protection Program) that could help them maintain payrolls.
- [One-time direct payments to many individuals](#) (\$1,200 per person; \$2,400 per married couple, with \$500 for each dependent).

The Census survey did not ask respondents how much employment income was lost, or how much of this loss was replaced by benefits. (This will not be known until the annual retrospective of income and poverty is released in 2021.) Researchers have used computer simulation models to estimate the impact of COVID-19-related employment losses and the impact of some of the policy changes to offset those losses (see studies [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). In summary, these studies find that the expanded benefits and one-time payments have the potential to offset projected increases in poverty from lost income due to COVID-19. However, not all eligible persons may receive benefits. Additionally, the studies note the additional income was concentrated in the April-July period. Income and poverty will continue to be affected by changes in economic activity and the degree to which temporary and permanent income maintenance policies offset lost employment income.

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