



Food Insecurity During COVID-19 in Households with Children: Results by Racial and Ethnic Groups

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“Food Insecurity During COVID-19 in Households with Children: Results by Racial and Ethnic Groups”

by **Diane Schanzenbach** and **Abigail Pitts**

Introduction

During the COVID-19 crisis, food insecurity rates among households with children have been sharply elevated—particularly so among Black and Hispanic respondents. In this report, we describe levels and trends in food insecurity among households with children, by the race/ethnicity of the adult respondent for the household. **We find that food insecurity rates and related measures of food hardship are elevated for all groups, and there is some evidence they have improved in recent weeks among White households.** We also explore additional household economic measures and find that substantial shares—especially among Black and Hispanics—are worried about their incomes and ability to afford the goods they need over the next four weeks. Together, these indicators paint a picture of substantial and disparate economic hardship during the COVID-19 era.

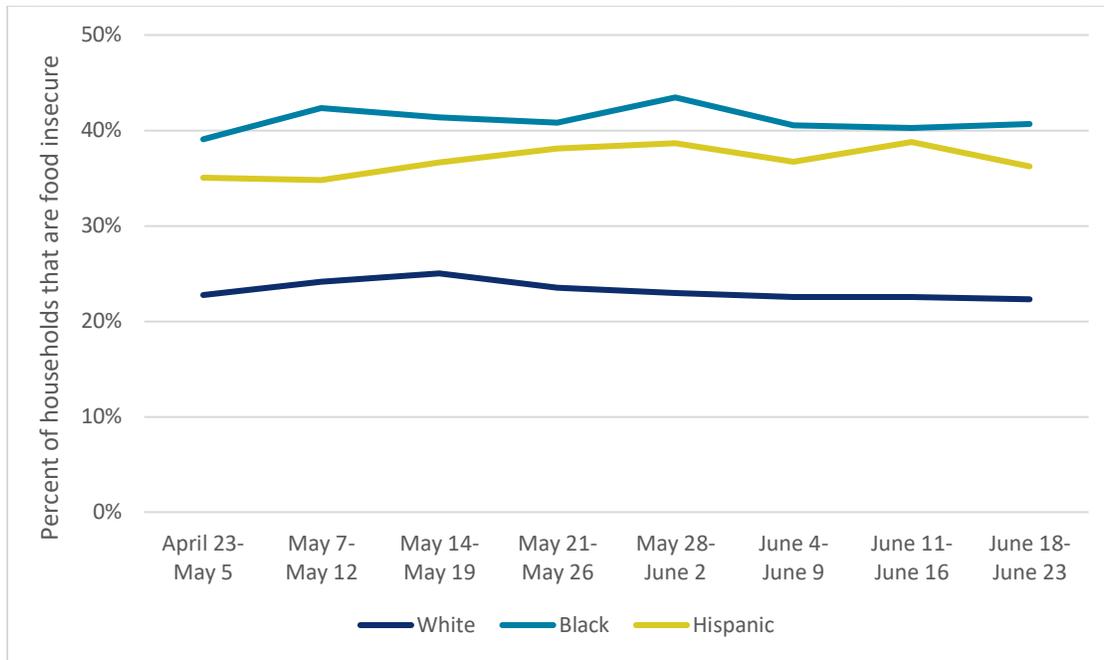
Weekly Data from the Census Household Pulse Survey

As described in [our prior work](#), the Census Household Pulse Survey (CHHPS) collects information on food sufficiency over the past 7 days. To estimate food security from these data, we use the relationship between food sufficiency and food security from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) calculated over 2015–18 for the same group. The results are qualitatively similar if we analyze food sufficiency instead of food security.

Disparities in food insecurity across racial and ethnic groups are large. Across the eight weeks for which CHHPS microdata are available covering April 23–June 23, 41.1% of Black respondents’ households have experienced food insecurity in the prior week, as have 36.9% of Hispanic respondents’ households and 23.2% of White respondents’ households. Across weeks, as shown in Figure 1, rates of food insecurity declined statistically from week 2 (May 7–12) to week 8 (June 18–23) among Whites but have remained statistically unchanged among Blacks and Hispanics.¹ Note that in order to produce household-level estimates, we require access to the CHHPS microdata, which lag the aggregate data releases by one week. The aggregate data for June 26–30 released on July 8, 2020, show a week-over-week increase in estimated (respondent-weighted) food insecurity by over one percentage point for all groups.

¹ There was a marginally but statistically significant increase in food insecurity among Hispanics between weeks 2 and 7, but in week 8 there was a decrease in food insecurity. The difference between weeks 2 and 8 are not statistically significant among Hispanics. We test with respect to the second week of CHHPS because that is the first data release that covers a single week; the first data release covered the period April 23–May 5.

Figure 1: Food Insecurity in Households with Children During COVID-19, by Race/Ethnicity



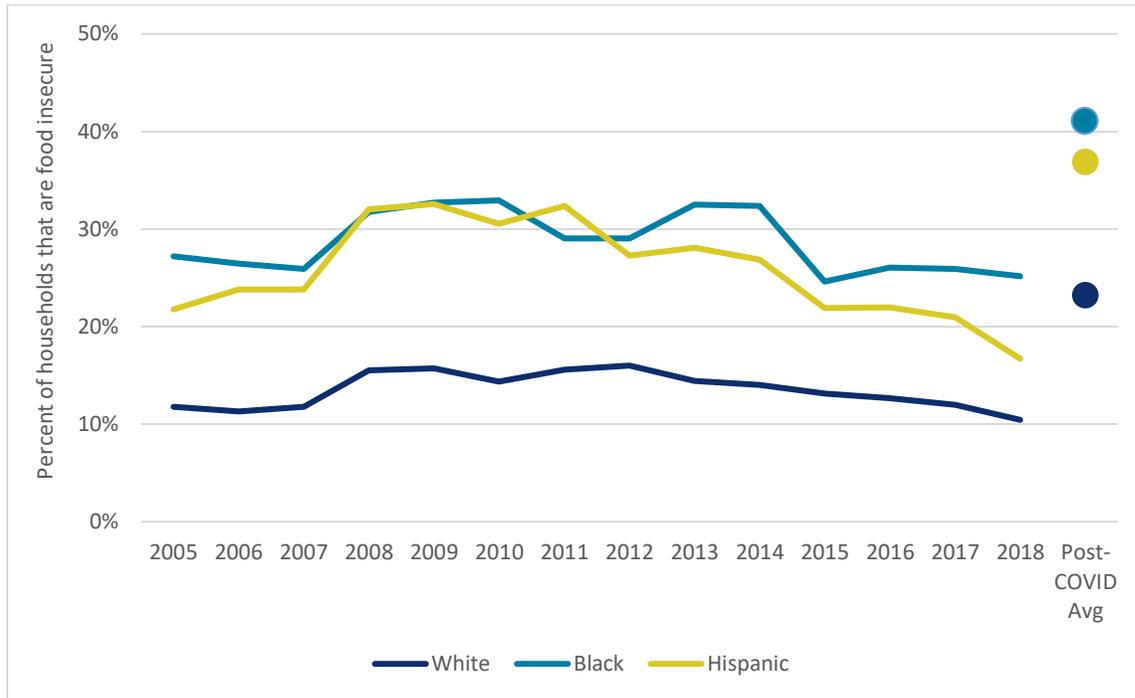
Notes: Data from 8 waves of CHHPS from April 23–June 23, 2020. Food insecurity is estimated using food security rates conditional on food sufficiency responses in the 2015–18 CPS-FSS as described in our prior work. CHHPS data are weighted using quasi-household weights calculated as the respondent weight divided by the number of adults in the household.

Historical Patterns in Food Insecurity

During the COVID-19 crisis, rates of food insecurity among Black households with children are nearly twice as high as they are among White households with children in the CHHPS. Rates for Hispanic respondents are 60% higher than they are among Whites. These ratios are similar to their historical patterns in the CPS-FSS, which for over 20 years has collected annual data on food insecurity experienced over the past year. The lines in Figure 2, below, show rates of annual food insecurity from 2005–18 from the CPS-FSS. Black households with children tend to have food insecurity rates that move in tandem with those of White households, increasing during recessions and coming down as the economy improves. However, rates among Black households tend to be approximately twice the rates among White households. The pattern is broadly similar for Hispanic households compared with Black households—though during the recent economic recovery, food insecurity declined more sharply among Hispanic households than among Black ones.

The large dots to the right in Figure 2 represent food insecurity rates averaged across April–June 2020 from the CHHPS. **Estimates of food insecurity doubled for White and Hispanic households and increased by 60% for Black households.** Recall that the reference periods are different across data sources: the 2005–18 data report collects annual rates of food insecurity while the estimates in the CHHPS report food insecurity are over the past week.

Figure 2: Food Insecurity Among Households with Children: 2005–18 and April–June 2020, by Race/Ethnicity



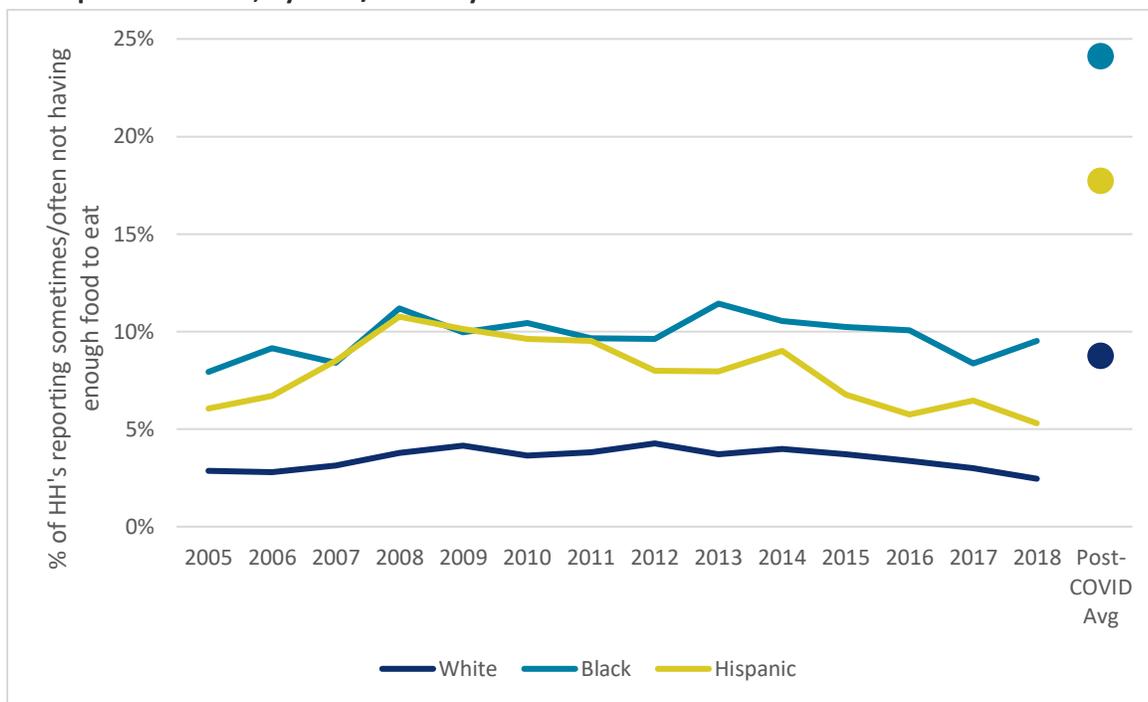
Notes: Data from 2005–18 CPS-FSS and April 23–June 23, 2020 CHHPS. The lines represent annual food insecurity rates from the CPS-FSS. The large dots to the right represent the average food insecurity rates over the last 7 days across 8 waves of the CHHPS from April 23–June 23, 2020. Food insecurity in the CHHPS is estimated using food security rates conditional on food sufficiency responses for each race/ethnicity group in the 2015–18 CPS-FSS as described in our [prior work](#). CHHPS data are weighted using quasi-household weights calculated as the respondent weight divided by the number of adults in the household.

‘Sometimes’ or ‘Often’ Not Enough to Eat

Another metric of food hardship is the share of households reporting that their members “sometimes” or “often” did not have enough to eat. This information comes directly from the food insufficiency question measured in the CHHPS. Fewer households report not having enough to eat than are categorized as being food insecure, and in annual CPS-FSS data, the share reporting that they did not have enough to eat closely tracks the share of households categorized as having “very low food security.”

Figure 3, below, shows the share of households with children reporting sometimes or often not having enough to eat. We see broadly similar historical trends to food insecurity, with Hispanic and Black households having higher rates of not having enough to eat compared to White households, and Hispanic households seeing sharper improvements during recovery from the recession. The large dots to the right represent the share of households reporting sometimes or often not enough to eat during the last week in the CHHPS. We find that this share has more than tripled for White and Hispanic households, and more than doubled for Black households.

Figure 3: Percent Reporting Not Enough to Eat Among Households with Children: 2005–18 and April–June 2020, by Race/Ethnicity

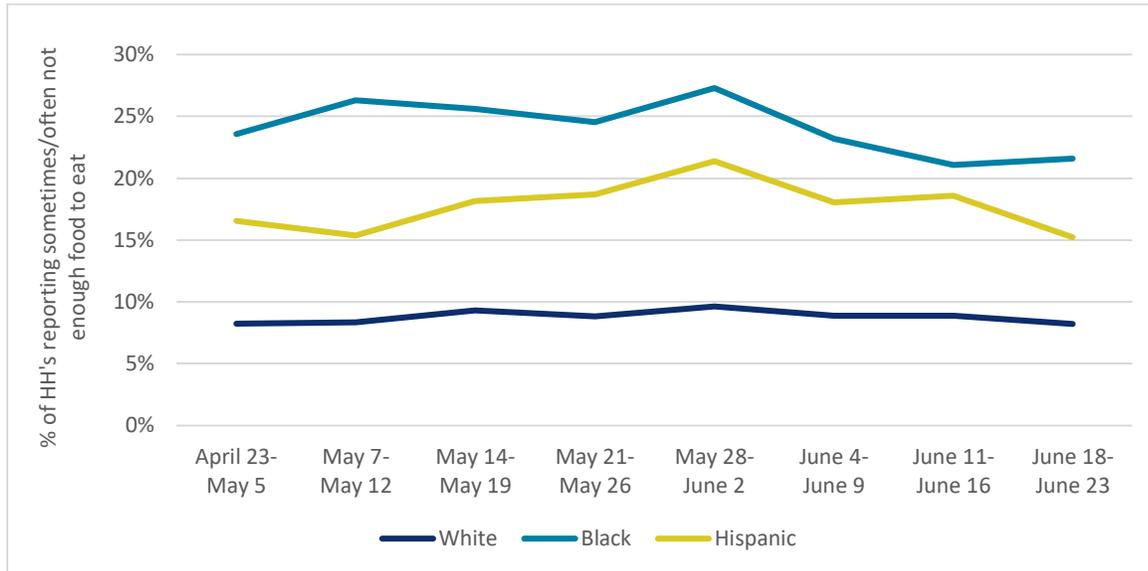


Notes: Data from 2005-2018 CPS-FSS and April 23-June 23, 2020 CHHPS. The lines represent the share of households reporting “sometimes” or “often” not having enough to eat in the last year in the CPS-FSS. The large dots to the right represent the average share of households reporting “sometimes” or “often” not having enough to eat in the last 7 days in 8 waves of the CHHPS from April 23–June 23, 2020, and are weighted using quasi-household weights calculated as the respondent weight divided by the number of adults in the household.

We can also examine how the share of households reporting “not enough” to eat has varied across the weeks of the CHHPS. The percentage of households with children reporting not enough to eat has remained statistically

unchanged between week 2 (May 7–May 12) and week 8 (June 18–23) of the CHHPS for White and Hispanic households. The percentage of Black households reporting not enough to eat has marginally but significantly decreased from 26.3% to 21.6%.

Figure 4: Percent Reporting Not Enough to Eat Among Households with Children: Weekly Data April–June 2020, by Race/Ethnicity



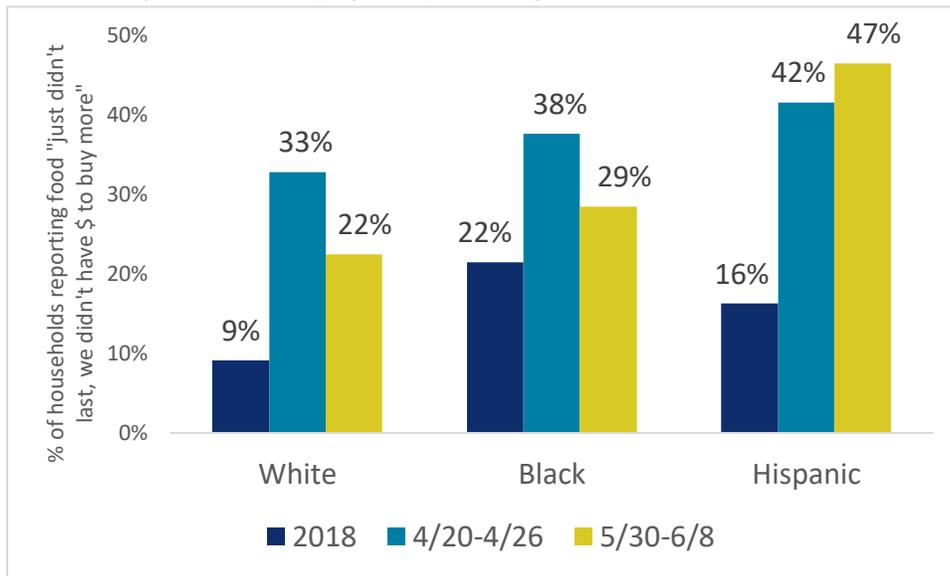
Notes: Data from 8 waves of CHHPS from April 23–June 23, 2020, weighted using quasi-household weights calculated as the respondent weight divided by the number of adults in the household.

Food Hardship in the COVID Impact Survey

An alternative measure of food hardship during the COVID-19 crisis comes from the COVID Impact Survey. In this survey, respondents were asked to what extent it was true for their households that over the past month “the food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.” We explored the first wave of COVID Impact Survey data in our earlier work; here we update the analysis to include the third wave of data collected from May 30–June 8, 2020. We compare data from the COVID Impact Survey to a similarly worded question from the National Health Interview Survey from 2018 (see Schanzenbach and Pitts, 2020, May 13, for more details).

The increase in food hardship between 2018 and April 2020 measured in the COVID Impact Survey is larger for each group than it is in the CHHPS, but the disparities across racial and ethnic groups are smaller. One in three White respondents with children reported food hardship in the April COVID Impact Survey, compared with 38% and 42% of Black and Hispanic respondents with children, respectively. In the COVID Impact Survey, rates of food hardship declined in the most recent wave of data, collected at the end of May and beginning of June for Whites and Blacks—though only the decrease among Whites is statistically significant. Nearly half of Hispanic households reported food hardship in the COVID Impact Survey’s May–June wave.

Figure 5. Percent of Respondents with Children Reporting ‘Food Didn’t Last, No Money to Buy More’: 2018 and April–June 2020, by Race/Ethnicity



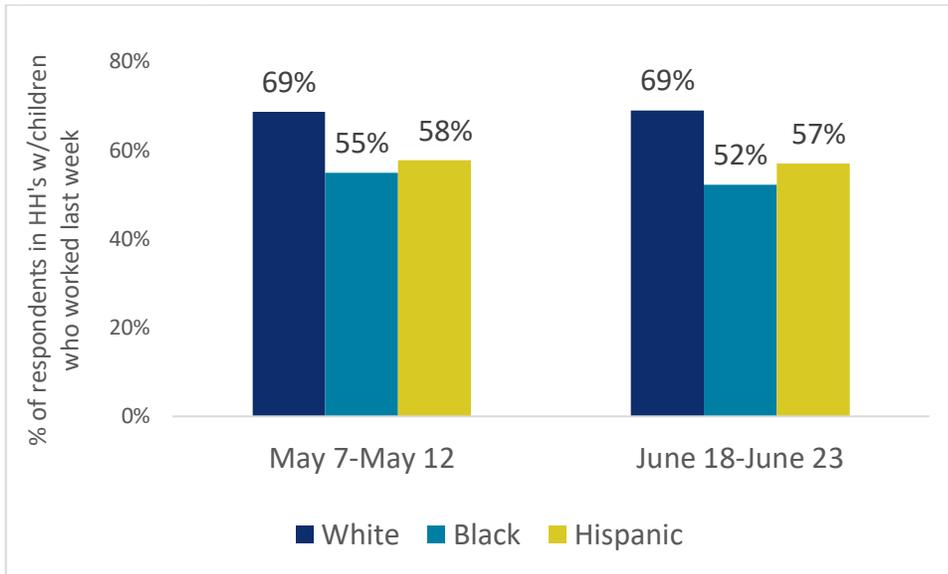
Notes: 2018 data from NHIS. April–June 2020 data from COVID Impact Survey.

Other Economic Trends

Consistent with the disparities in food insecurity observed, a series of additional economic indicators that can be calculated from the CHPS show worse conditions among Black and Hispanic households, and in many cases are trending in worsening directions. The first indicator, shown in Figure 6, is the share of (non-retired) respondents in households with children who reported working last week. In the week of May 7–12, 69% of Whites reported working in the prior week, compared with 55% of Blacks and 58% of Hispanics. In the week of June 18–23, the rates among Blacks and Hispanics edged down to 52% and 57%, respectively.²

² Official U.S. unemployment rates were 12.4% for Whites, 16.8% for Blacks, and 17.6% for Hispanics in May, and the unemployment rates decreased to 10.1%, 15.4%, and 14.5% for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, respectively in June. The official monthly unemployment rates are calculated based on employment in the Current Population Survey’s reference week, which is the week where the 12th of the month falls.

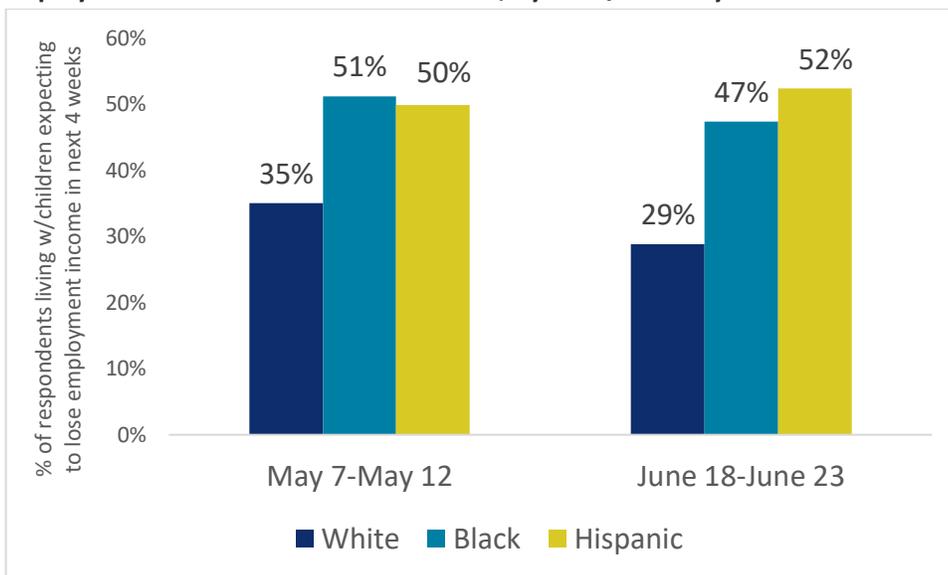
Figure 6. Percentage of Respondents in Households with Children Who Worked the Prior Week, by Race/Ethnicity



Notes: Data from CHHPS waves from May 7–12, 2020 and June 18–23, 2020. Data exclude those who reported not working because they were retired.

Figure 7 reports a forward-looking indicator, showing the share of respondents who expect to lose employment income in the next four weeks. **About half of Black and half of Hispanic respondents say they expect to lose employment in the coming weeks—rates that are much higher than those among Whites.** For households with children, the share of Whites expecting to lose income has statistically declined between weeks 2 and 8, while the rates for Blacks and Hispanics are statistically unchanged.

Figure 7. Percentage of Respondents in Households with Children Who Report They Expect to Lose Employment Income in the Next 4 Weeks, by Race/Ethnicity

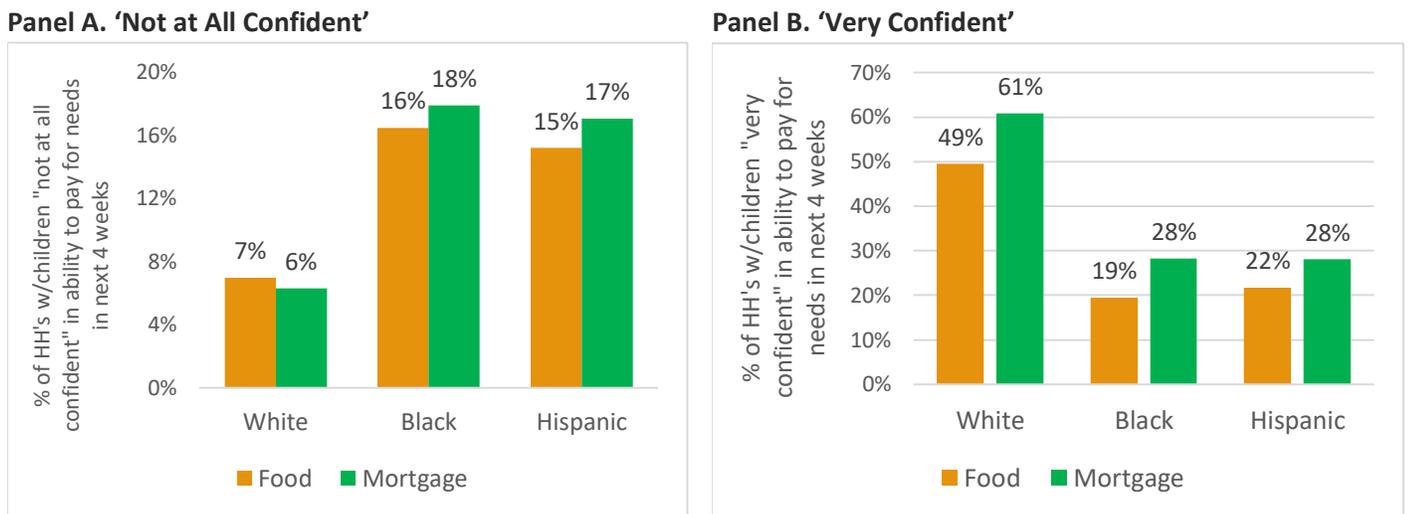


Notes: Data from CHHPS waves from May 7–12, 2020 and June 18–23, 2020. Data are respondent-weighted.

Another set of indicators collected by CHHPS is to what extent respondents are confident that they will be able to afford basic needs in the next 4 weeks. In Panel A of Figure 8, we report the share indicating in the June 18–23 survey that they are “not at all confident” they will be able to pay for the food they need (orange bars) or their next mortgage/rent payment (green bars) in the next 4 weeks. Among Whites, 6–7% of households report being not at all confident they can afford these items over the next 4 weeks.

In Panel B, approximately 60% of Whites are “very confident” they will be able to pay their mortgage/rent, and almost half are very confident they will be able to afford food. Among Blacks, the rate that is not at all confident is 16% for food and 18% for rent/mortgage. At the other end of the range, only 19% and 28% of Blacks report being very confident they can afford food and rent/mortgage, respectively. Among Hispanics, 15% are not at all confident they can afford food and 17% are not at all confident they can pay their next rent/mortgage payment. The rates of Hispanics reporting they are very confident they can afford these are only 22% and 28%, for food and rent/mortgage, respectively. The rates of households reporting they are not at all confident in their ability to afford these goods are quite similar to those reported in early May.

Figure 8. Confidence in Ability to Afford Food, Mortgage/Rent in Next 4 Weeks, Households with Children by Race/Ethnicity



Notes: Data from June 18–23, 2020 CHHPS. Data are weighted using quasi-household weights calculated as the respondent weight divided by the number of adults in the household.

Conclusions

Data collected during the COVID-19 crisis indicate that rates of food insecurity and other measures of food hardship in households with children are dramatically elevated compared with pre-COVID levels. In addition, **Black and Hispanic households with children are much more likely to experience food hardships than are White households with children.** Other measures, including current employment status, as well as expectations about future income losses and the ability to afford necessities, also show important disparities across racial and ethnic groups. **As others have argued, these patterns indicate the need for continued relief payments until the economy rebounds, such as increased SNAP and Unemployment Insurance payments.**

The Census Household Pulse Survey has been providing timely information on a range of measures during the COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, it is scheduled to cease releasing new data in the coming weeks. To continue to monitor real-time impacts of COVID-19 and devise appropriate policy solutions, we encourage Congress to authorize an extension of the data collection.
