COVID-19 Pandemic in the Houston Region – Family and Well-being

Findings from the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey

The coronavirus pandemic has upended the lives of Houston area families and households. Beyond its widespread health impacts, the pandemic disrupted jobs, wages, education, child care, and more. To better understand the ways COVID-19 was experienced by families in the Houston area, the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC), in collaboration with Connective (previously, Harvey Home Connect), launched the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey in March 2020. This report is part of a three report series and focuses on families and their well-being during the first six months of the pandemic. Families confronted COVID-19 with very different resources and these inequalities were exacerbated by the pandemic. The consequences of the pandemic for families and their well-being are still not fully known, but they have not been borne equitably. The report provides recommendations for confronting the inequalities highlighted and worsened by COVID-19.

Key Findings

- **One-third of households had enough money in savings to cover one month of expenses.** Only 8 percent of households earning less than $50,000 per year reported having enough money in savings to cover one month of expenses compared to 80 percent of households earning $100,000 per year or more.

- **More than half of respondents requested help getting connected to organizations providing assistance.** Most often families requested help finding assistance for financial needs, utilities, food, or home goods.

- **At the start of the pandemic, people experienced food shortages because of others’ panic buying, but that changed over time.** More than one in five Houston-area families reported not having enough food, and at the start of the pandemic, the most common reason for the shortage was that stores had run out of food. By late summer 2020, the most common reason for families experiencing a food shortage was lost wages.

- **Most families had an adult who could stay home to provide child care once schools closed down, but this differed by household income.** Nearly 70 percent of families said an adult was available to be home and provide child care once schools switched to remote learning, but this differed by family income. About 90 percent of families making $100,000 per year or more had an adult who could stay home, compared to only 50 percent of families making less than $50,000 per year.

- **The pandemic contributed to feeling hopeless and increased conflict at home across the Houston area.** One-quarter of households reported feeling hopeless, and, among these households, many reported having more conflict at home.
Background

In the year since COVID-19 spread across the American landscape, nearly 30 million people in the United States have tested positive for the virus, with more than 529,000 losing their lives to the disease (Johns Hopkins, 2021). In Harris County, Texas – where Houston, the fourth most populous city in the United States, is located – more than 360,000 people have tested positive for COVID-19 resulting in more than 3,400 deaths (Harris County Public Health, 2021). The cost of these impacts to families and communities cannot be overstated. For other Houston-area residents, while they may not have contracted COVID-19, the virus still carried consequences for them because of its disruptions to the economy, public education, and family life and well-being.

While COVID-19 has impacted everyone to some extent, it has not impacted everyone equally. Families and households have been able to weather the pandemic differently depending on their available resources. Disease and disasters disproportionately disrupt the lives of disadvantaged individuals (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018; Elliott & Pais, 2006; Lai et al., 2019; Phifer, 1990). Pandemics are no exception (Wade, 2020), and COVID-19 is no different.

Family and Well-being

Physical distancing, shuttered businesses, and “stay home, stay safe” orders led to millions in the Houston area retreating into their homes to work, learn, and wait out the early days of the pandemic. The home became ground zero for much of the pandemic’s impacts (Martin et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020). Yet pre-existing systemic inequalities meant that as families confronted the virus, not all were equally resourced to handle the new demands placed on them by the evolving and uncertain times.

As hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost in the span of a few weeks, and others saw their work hours significantly reduced (Jankowski, 2020), families were forced to make ends meet. For some, it was a matter of dipping into savings, but for many families there were no savings to use (Carballo, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, about one in three Americans reported having no savings, including one in 10 making more than $100,000 per year (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Many families turned to local organizations for supports and services (Lloyd, 2020; Pryce, 2020). The increased need in the Houston community placed unprecedented demands on local non-profits, such as food banks (Lakhani et al., 2020).

For families who faced lost or lower incomes, one of the most pressing issues was paying the rent or mortgage (Broady et al., 2020). Following federal and Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, eviction and foreclosure moratoriums went into effect in Harris County and the City of Houston in summer 2020 and have been continued through early 2021 (McClenod, 2020; Ramirez, 2020). In August 2020, Harris County set up a $40 million Emergency Rental Assistance Program using money from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress to help families in the Houston area (Rice, 2020). Within a month of the program’s inception, more than $60 million in

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1 The Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey (the data used for this report) was originally collected so families and households could get connected with local non-profit organizations and services. As part of the survey, respondents were directly asked if they would like to be contacted with information about potential assistance (e.g., financial assistance, food assistance, utilities assistance).
assistance had been requested (Natario, 2020), and despite the moratorium, by the end of 2020, Houston ranked second in the nation in the number of eviction filings during the pandemic (Mathews, 2020), with over 17,000 filings (Eviction Lab, 2020).

The pandemic also placed strains on families in terms of not having enough food to eat – often referred to as food insecurity – or access to child care. Nationwide, nearly one in six households reported food insecurity during the early days of the pandemic (Waxman et al., 2020). For many of the families, during the early months of pandemic this food insecurity resulted from others panic buying – or buying more than needed in order to stock up on food and home goods (e.g., toilet paper, paper towels) – which created shortages in stores (Besson, 2020). Parents were also put in the position of needing to find child care, particularly once schools shifted to remote instruction. Many parents were able to provide child care by shifting their own jobs to work from home. For others, finding child care was more challenging, as people deemed essential workers (e.g., health care workers, grocery store/food service employees, first responders) had to continue going to work, and others were looking for work after being laid off or having their hours reduced at their previous job (Workman & Jessen-Howard, 2020).

In light of all the mounting pressures on the family, the pandemic took its toll on overall well-being, including mental health (Holingue et al., 2020; Kumar & Nayar, 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). For example, people who reported the pandemic had brought about a major change to their personal lives reported additional psychological distress compared to people whose personal lives the pandemic had not changed (Holingue et al., 2020).

This report examines the ways in which COVID-19 strained families and their well-being during the first six months of the pandemic, and is part of a series of reports. These reports collectively look at many of the social consequences of the pandemic in the Houston area. The other reports in the series focus on wages and employment and education and schooling.

**Data and Methods**

The data used for this report came from the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey, which was a joint data collection between Connective (previously Harvey Home Connect) and HERC, a program of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University. Data collected for the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey began in late March 2020. While the survey is ongoing, the results from this report focus on responses collected in the first six months of the pandemic through late September 2020.

**Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey**

Approximately 12,100 households had responded by late September. Since another report in the series was focused on education and schooling, the analytic sample for this report was limited to households with children. The analytic sample size was 9,331 households.

Please note the data for this analysis came from the first six months of the pandemic, but as the pandemic continues to evolve, so too do its social consequences. Experiences, attitudes, and opinions

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2 Limiting the sample to households with children resulted in 2,769 households and 6,069 individuals getting dropped from the original sample. Analyses focused on or including households without children may provide a different view of COVID-19 experiences in the Houston area, and is left for consideration by other researchers.
may have changed since the data were collected. Still, findings in this report come from unique and otherwise unavailable data (see Appendix A for more details on the sample). While the survey covered a range of topics on families and their well-being, this report draws attention to five in particular: 1) availability of financial resources, 2) requested assistance, 3) experiences of food insecurity, 4) availability of in-home child care, and 5) mental health well-being and conflict in the home during the first six months of the pandemic. Interested readers can explore other topics related to family and well-being here: https://www.gulfcoastcovidsurvey.org/surveydata.

Descriptive Statistics

All results in this report are descriptive in nature, meaning the findings highlight relationships and associations but do not establish causation. Statistical tests were run, and each of the differences included in this report is statistically significant at a \( p < 0.05 \)-level (unless otherwise noted).

Findings: COVID-19 Impacts in the Houston Area - Family and Well-being

Availability of Financial Resources

The pandemic often required families to reach into their savings to cover expenses, but for many in the Houston area, there were not enough savings to rely on. Only one-third of respondents reported having enough money in savings to cover a month of expenses, and this varied by annual income and race/ethnicity. Less than one in 10 families making $50,000 per year or less had enough money in the bank to pay for a month of rent, utilities, food, and other necessities, even in the case of an emergency (Figure 1).

Figure 2 displays differences in the availability of savings to cover a month of expenses by race/ethnicity for families in the Houston area. More than half of Asian and white families reported having enough money to cover a month of expenses. In contrast, only one in four Hispanic families, one in five Black families, and one in three multiracial families reported having access to such funds.

Note: Chi-square used to test association between a household's annual income and the having enough money to cover a month of expenses \( (p < 0.01) \). \( n = ~8,290 \).

Source: Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey
The picture of wealth inequality provided by these data offers evidence of which families were in a better position to weather the pandemic than others. As the early economic consequences of COVID-19 took shape, families without the financial resources in savings experienced the most severe disruptions to their wages and employment. Only 18 percent of households that reported experiencing a high-severity disruption to their wages and employment – meaning at least one household member had lost a job, been furloughed, or had to close a business – had enough money in savings to cover a month of expenses (Figure 3). Conversely, about 65 percent of households who had a low severity disruption to their wages and employment – meaning someone in the household expected their job might be affected but, otherwise, no change occurred – reported having enough money in savings to cover a month of expenses. Families experiencing a medium severity disruption to their wages and employment – meaning someone in the household earned less or had to work fewer hours – fell in the middle: about 35 percent had enough money in savings to cover one month of expenses.

Figure 2. Black, Hispanic, and Multiracial families were less likely than Asian and white families to report having enough money to cover a month of expenses.

Note: Chi-square used to test association between a household’s race/ethnicity and the having enough money to cover a month of expenses (p < 0.01). n = ~9,250.
Source: Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey

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<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
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Request for Assistance during the Pandemic

Reflecting increased needs throughout the Houston area during the first six months of the pandemic, about half of respondents requested help in getting connected to resources and supports (Figure 4). More than 70 percent of Black families, nearly 60 percent of Hispanic families, and more than half of multiracial families requested help with getting assistance. Each of these percentages was higher than the percentage requesting help getting connected to resources in white (29 percent) and Asian (43 percent) families. Another group that was more likely to request help getting connected to assistance were households in which Spanish was the primary language spoken. About 69 percent of Spanish-speaking households asked for help getting connected to assistance compared to about 47 percent of English-speaking households.

Families who have a member with a disability also faced a unique set of challenges during the pandemic (Chakraborty, 2021). About two-thirds of these families requested information about assistance compared to less than half of families who do not have a member with a disability.

Household annual income was also related to requests for help getting connected to assistance. About three-fourths of households making less than $50,000 per year asked for help getting connected to assistance compared to 17 percent of households making $100,000 per year or more. Although many

Note: High severity disruption to wages and employed occurred if a member of the household lost a job, was furloughed, or had to close a business; medium severity disruption to wages and employment occurred if a household had to work fewer hours or earned less; and low severity impact to a household’s wages and employment occurred if no one in the household had their job disrupted during the first six months of the pandemic. Chi-square used to test difference in severity of disruption to wages and employment and availability of enough money to cover a month of expenses (p < 0.01). n = ~9,250.

Source: Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey
families in the Houston area expressed needs for assistance, such needs were acute among families earning less than $50,000 per year.

The proportion of families requesting assistance varied by race/ethnicity, primary language spoken in the home, and annual household earnings, but there was consistency in the type of assistance families sought. Most commonly, families who requested help getting connected to assistance asked for financial (70 percent), utilities (61 percent), food (59 percent), and home supplies (55 percent) assistance. In other words, families requested help to keep a roof over their heads, electricity turned on, food on the table, and other basic necessities, like toilet paper, in the home. About 30 percent of households requested getting assistance with accessing the internet as schools shifted to 100% remote instruction. Finally, about 20 percent of households requested help getting connected to mental health services.
Experiences of Food Insecurity

Twenty percent of respondents said they experienced food insecurity, i.e., not having enough food, during the first six months of the pandemic. In March 2020 at the start of the pandemic, nearly 80% of households reporting food insecurity said the main reason was because stores were out of stock (see Figure 6, green line). In contrast, at the same time, about 20 percent of respondents who experienced food insecurity said the main reason was because of lost wages or employment (see Figure 6, blue line). For each subsequent month after March, these reasons started to meet – with more respondents saying they were food insecure because of lost wages and fewer respondents blaming stores being out of stock – until they converged in June. In late summer 2020, lost wages became the most common reason for food insecurity: more than half the families reporting food insecurity said it was mainly because of lost wages. During this same period, from July through September, only about one-third of families experiencing food insecurity pointed to stores being out of stock as the primary culprit.
Providing Child Care

During the first six months of the pandemic, after schools shifted to 100 percent online instruction, families in the Houston area needed to plan child care and supervision. For nearly 70 percent of households in the Houston area, an adult or extended family member was either already home or had a job with flexible work policies that allowed them to be home. This availability looked very different based on annual income (Figure 7). Nearly 90 percent of families with annual incomes over $100,000 per year had an adult available in the household to care for a child home from school. Most often, an adult was available because one or both parents or guardians had flexible work policies that allowed them to work remotely. In contrast, although more than half of families earning less than $50,000 per year had an adult available in the household to care for a child home from school, it was most often because there was a non-working adult in the home (see Figure 7, light blue for <$50k).
Although the majority of families in the Houston area had an adult or extended family member who could supervise children home from school during the first six months of the pandemic, this was not the case for every household. For about 30 percent of families, the new pressure of having to provide child care and supervision to children home from school was either not an option or an option that would require quitting or cutting-back hours at work. Families earning less than $50,000 per year were more likely than families earning more than $100,000 per year to report not having an adult who could stay home with children. For some of these families, like single-parent households, there was not another adult available to watch the children. For other families, while there might have been multiple adults in the household, no one had a job with the flexible work policies needed to be able to stay home without having to take time off without pay or quit. During the first six months of the pandemic, many families, particularly those earning less than $50,000 per year, had to choose between keeping their jobs or caring for their children.

**Mental Health and Conflict at Home**

The added stress and strain of the pandemic on jobs, education, and day-to-day life was detrimental to people’s well-being. Overall, about 26 percent of households reported feeling hopeless during the first six months of the pandemic (Figure 8). This number was slightly higher for Black households (30 percent) and Hispanic households (31 percent) than for white and Asian households (19 percent each). Annual income was also associated with feeling hopeless: about 40 percent of households with incomes less than...
$50,000 per year reported feeling hopeless compared to about 12 percent of households earning $100,000 per year or more.

Figure 8. More than one-quarter of households reported feeling hopeless during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic

Looking more expressly at the role the pandemic may have played in well-being, households who experienced disruptions to their wages and employment, lacked access to the internet or a digital device for their children to do schoolwork, experienced food shortages, did not have enough money in savings to cover a month of expenses, or requested help getting connected to assistance reported feeling hopeless more often than families who did not have these pandemic-related experiences (Figure 9).

Almost 40 percent of households who had a high-severity disruption to their wages and employment – that is, someone in the household lost a job, got furloughed, or had to close a business – reported feeling hopeless compared to 14 percent of households where no one’s job had been affected. About 44 percent of households reporting they did not have access to the internet or a digital device for their child to use for doing schoolwork reported feeling hopeless compared to about 22 percent of households who had these technology resources. Nearly half of households (48 percent) who experienced food insecurity in the first six months of the pandemic also reported feeling hopeless.
For many families in the Houston area, some of the same pressures from the pandemic that contributed to feeling hopeless also created increased conflict in the home (Dellinger, 2020). About one in five families reported they had more conflict in the home during the first six months of the pandemic (Figure 10). Unlike other trends in this report in which the negative consequences of the pandemic were disproportionately concentrated among Black, Hispanic, and families with lower incomes, white families were more likely to report increased conflict and there was no difference in increased conflict by annual income. Specifically, 18 percent of Asian families, 18 percent of Black families, and 18 percent of Hispanic families reported more conflict in the home during the pandemic compared to 24 percent of white families and 30 percent of multiracial families. In terms of household annual income, 22 percent of families earning less than $50,000 per year reported having more conflict compared to 23 percent of families earning between $50,000-$100,000 per year and 20 percent of families earning more than $100,000 per year. These percentages were not meaningfully different from one another.
Households that reported experiencing other consequences from the pandemic, such as disruptions to wages and employment, were more likely to report more conflict in the home (Figure 11). One-quarter of families who reported a high-severity disruption to their wages and employment (i.e., losing a job, getting furloughed, or having to close a business) during the first six months of the pandemic reported increased conflict in the home. In contrast, 17 percent of households who experienced low-severity disruption reported increased conflict. A similar pattern was observed for families experiencing other negative outcomes from the pandemic. Families more likely to report feeling hopeless were the same families who lacked access to the internet or a digital device for children to use for school work (i.e., the digital divide), did not have enough food at home (i.e., food insecurity), did not have enough money to cover a month of expenses, or requested help getting assistance.
Finally, lower well-being and increases in conflict often went together during the first six months of the pandemic. Among families who reported feeling hopeless, 40 percent reported more conflict in the home. For families who did not report feeling hopeless, 15 percent reported more conflict at home.

**Figure 11. Negative experiences from COVID were related to more conflict in the home, particularly reports of feeling hopeless.**

- Disruption to wages and employment:
  - Low: 17
  - Medium: 21
  - High: 25

- Digital divide:
  - No: 20
  - Yes: 27

- Food insecurity:
  - No: 19
  - Yes: 31

- Money to cover one month of expenses:
  - No: 25
  - Yes: 17

- Request for assistance:
  - No: 17
  - Yes: 25

- Felt hopeless:
  - No: 15
  - Yes: 40

Percentage reporting more conflict during COVID-19 pandemic

Note: High severity disruption to wages and employment occurred if a member of the household lost a job, was furloughed, or had to close a business; medium severity disruption to wages and employment occurred if a household had to work fewer hours or earned less; and low severity impact to a household’s wages and employment occurred if no one in the household had their job disrupted during the first six months of the pandemic. Digital divide refers to disparities in available technology resources, and “Yes” means a household reported they did not have access to the internet or a digital device for their child(ren) to use for schoolwork. “No” means a household had both access to the internet and a digital device. Chi-square used to test association between more conflict in the home and disruptions to wages and employment (p < 0.01; n = ~9,330), digital divide (p < 0.01; n = ~9,330), food insecurity (p < 0.01; n = ~9,330), money to cover one month of expenses (p < 0.01; n = ~9,250), request for assistance (p < 0.01; n = ~9,330), and felt hopeless (p < 0.01; n = ~9,330).

Source: Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey

**Discussions and Recommendations**

Home and family life were substantially altered during the COVID-19 pandemic. For millions across the Houston region, employees were sent home or jobs were eliminated altogether, schools shut down and learning shifted to 100 percent online instruction, and people needed to quarantine and stay home to stay safe during an international health crisis. Faced with these challenges, how well families were able to withstand these interruptions to life differed, in particular by race/ethnicity and annual income.
One-third of families had the financial resources available to cover one month of expenses at the start of the pandemic. Many families drained their savings to survive the pandemic (Carballo, 2020), and while the pandemic certainly exacerbated disparities in available savings by race/ethnicity and annual income, it did not create them. Differences in the availability of savings highlighted in this report reflect persistent and systemic intergenerational inequality in the United States (Chetty et al., 2014). Given the differences observed in terms of available resources, it is perhaps not surprising that similar differences were observed for families requesting help connecting to assistance. This is particularly unsurprising since the majority of respondents requesting help were looking for assistance covering the basic essentials—financial resources to pay the rent or mortgage, utilities assistance to keep the lights on and water flowing to the home, and home supplies assistance to provide their family with items like toilet paper, paper towels, and other basic day-to-day goods.

Throughout this report, the racial, ethnic, and income inequalities present in our social landscape predicted which families and households bore the most significant brunt during the early days of the pandemic. To this end, the pandemic exacerbated and exploited pre-existing inequalities, such as the race/ethnic gap in food insecurity or the family income disparities in available child care, and differences in household members feeling hopeless. The early days of the pandemic most certainly made these inequalities worse, but the truth is these experiences of not having enough food, being unsure about who would take care of a child while at work, and feelings of hopelessness are unfortunately common occurrences for many Houston-area families (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2014; Lloyd, 2020; Texas Health and Human Services, 2018; Workman & Jessen-Howard, 2020).

The somewhat counterintuitive finding about which households reported more conflict in the home during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic may, in part, be explained by incessant inequality, as well. Saturation theory posits that a person who has already been exposed to several negative experiences, like poverty, homelessness, or unemployment, will exhibit less of a response to additional negative experiences because they have reached a point of saturation (Hannon, 2003; McNulty, 2001). In contrast, a person with fewer past negative experiences will react more strongly to new negative stimuli. The pandemic was a new negative stimuli for all families, but it may have created more conflict in white, English-speaking, and higher-income families because they weren’t already saturated with the repercussions of everyday inequity.

In the year since the pandemic began, policies and programs have been implemented to support families and provide for their well-being. Despite these efforts, additional work is still needed to help families return to their pre-pandemic circumstances with significantly more work necessary to address systemic inequalities that made families vulnerable to the social consequences of COVID-19. Findings from the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey can be used to support the following recommendations:

1. **Conduct an equity audit of Harris County.** Many of the gaps reflected in this report were likely exacerbated by the pandemic, but COVID-19 did not create the resource inequalities. Differences in families’ financial resources, experiences of food insecurity, child care access, and strains to mental health well-being were present prior to the pandemic. Implementing policies and practices to close these inequities first requires understanding their root causes, and an equity audit of Harris County might provide regional stakeholders with important information for decision making.
2. **Develop and disseminate a list of available resources to families and households in the Houston area.** Twenty percent of respondents reported not having enough food, one-third did not have available child care once children were sent home from school, and more than one-quarter expressed feeling hopeless. These circumstances resulted in more than half of survey respondents requesting additional information about potential assistance opportunities. Many families and households in the Houston area might benefit from extra support, and there are many community organizations that can provide that extra support. Developing and disseminating a list of available resources in the Houston area would help families connect with community organizations on a more regular basis, and ensure families gained access to the resources to help them help themselves and thrive.

3. **Create or expand community mental health wellness initiatives.** Over a quarter of respondents reported feeling hopeless. One-fifth of respondents reported increased conflict in the home during the first six months of the pandemic. Ensuring individual mental health services are available will help address some of this need. Borrowing from strategies used to address other widespread health problems, the mental health challenges in Houston area communities might also benefit from solutions focused more broadly than the individual (Schwartz et al., 2018). Mental health wellness initiatives aimed at entire communities might help rejuvenate both individual and neighborhood well-being. Such initiatives might include projects like building community centers, rehabbing local parks, and hosting local festivals, such as county fairs, cultural events, and artistic performances. To prevent these initiatives from recreating existing disparities, community initiatives should be designed, developed, and implemented equitably. Done right, these programs might give families and households places to be together and experiences to share. Reconnecting and growing communities would hopefully reduce feeling hopeless, and provide healthier communities for families and households.
References


References


Appendix: Details of Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey

The Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey was an online survey launched on March 23, 2020. The survey was accessible to anyone with an internet connection living in the Gulf Coast region. The survey’s website, with accompanying interactive data dashboard, is located at the following URL: https://www.gulfcoastcovidsurvey.org/. Data for the analyses contained in this report were downloaded September 18, 2020.

The survey consisted of about 50 questions and was designed to serve two purposes. First, the most immediate purpose of the survey was to gather information about family and household needs so that Connective (previously Harvey Home Connect) could connect respondents with non-profits and other organizations around the Houston region who were providing assistance. Connective was able to use survey responses to inform families and households about utility assistance, food banks, food delivery programs, rental assistance, financial counseling, telemedicine/telehealth, domestic violence resources, and childcare assistance. The second purpose of the survey, and the one most relevant for the current report, was to collect information on the economic, social, and personal impacts of the pandemic on families and households around the region.

The survey asked respondents about the impacts of COVID-19 in three major areas: wages and employment, education and schooling, and family and well-being. Wages and employment questions asked respondents if members of their household had earned less money, worked fewer hours, lost a job, or been forced to close a business because of the pandemic. Education and schooling questions asked respondents about communication from schools/districts about the pandemic, concern with student preparedness for the fall, and experiences of digital divide — a term used to describe disparities in access to computers and devices or internet services necessary for online education. Family and well-being questions asked about issues providing supervision to children, food and home goods shortages, and experiences of mental health strain and conflict in the household.

In addition to collecting information on the impacts of the pandemic, the survey also gathered basic household demographic information, such as household size, presence of children, race/ethnicity, and annual earnings. This demographic information allows for comparison of the impacts across groups in the population, such as looking at how COVID-19 impacted different race/ethnic groups and higher- and lower-income households.

Appendix Table 1 provides a comparison of respondent characteristics from the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey, with recent estimates from the American Community Survey for Harris County, Texas. In general, the Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact survey has slightly more white respondents and fewer Hispanic respondents than in the Houston area overall. There is also an over-representation of households earning less than $35,000 per year and an under-representation of households earning over $100,000 per year in the survey data. Given these differences in sample versus population characteristics reiterates the need to interpret findings from this report with caution, and not over-generalize. It is, however, worth noting the survey data reflect much of the diversity in Harris County, both in terms of race/ethnicity and household income.
### Appendix Table 1. Survey Estimates Compared to Population Estimates, Harris County

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</tbody>
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**Source:** American Community Survey (ACS), Harris County, Texas, five-year estimate, 2014-2019. Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey.
About HERC. Focusing on the most pressing challenges facing the region, the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) is a research-practice partnership between Rice University and 11 Houston-area school districts. HERC aims to improve the connection between education research and decision making for the purpose of equalizing outcomes by race, ethnicity, economic status, and other factors associated with inequitable educational opportunities.