

Gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' widened by the COVID pandemic: study

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A new study by Indiana University found women, younger individuals, those with lower levels of formal education, and people of color are being hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Indiana University

A new study by Indiana University found women, younger individuals, those with lower levels of formal education, and people of color are being hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal, found that Black adults were three times as likely as whites to report food [insecurity](#), being laid off, or being unemployed during the [pandemic](#). Additionally, residents without a [college degree](#) were twice as likely to report food insecurity (compared to those with some college) while those not completing high school are four times as likely to report it, compared to those with a bachelor's degree.

These patterns persisted even after taking into account employment status and [financial hardship](#) before the pandemic, suggesting that the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" is being widened by the crisis.

The study found that younger adults and women were also more likely to report economic hardships.

"It is clear that the pandemic has had an extraordinary impact on the economic security of individuals who were already vulnerable and among disadvantaged groups," said Bernice Pescosolido, a distinguished professor of sociology at IU and co-author of the study. "This work demonstrates the need for strategically deployed [relief efforts](#) and longer-term policy reforms to challenge the perennial and unequal impact of disasters."

Researchers utilized the Person to Person Health Interview Study (P2P) - a statewide representative, face-to-face survey—to interview nearly 1,000 Indiana residents before (October 2018-March 2020) and during the initial stay at home order in (March-May 2020). Their goal was to determine differences in experiences of economic hardship among historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups following the COVID-19 lockdown. The authors measured four self-reported indicators of economic precarity: [housing insecurity](#), [food insecurity](#), general financial insecurity, and unemployment or job loss.

Previous research has shown national and global crises tend to disproportionately impact those who were already struggling financially, and it takes more vulnerable communities significantly longer to recover from disasters.

These previous findings are in line with the IU study, which shows Indiana residents already concerned with their housing, food and finances reported greater concerns with these [economic hardships](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Providing basic resources to all Americans, such as generous unemployment benefits, paid family leave, affordable federal housing and universal preschool will help communities better weather

crisis," said Brea Perry, professor of sociology at IU and co-author of the study. "We need to rethink how we intervene in disasters and also strengthen our [social safety net](#) for everyone."

Perry and her team have plans to follow up after the pandemic to understand the long-term impact that COVID-19 has had on individuals and their families. While the impact may not be fully understood at this time, she said we do know that rebuilding public health and other social structures will not only assist disadvantaged groups in times of need, it will also help society at large.

More information: "Pandemic precarity: COVID-19 is exposing and exacerbating inequalities in the American heartland," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2021). DOI: [10.1073/pnas.2020685118](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2020685118) , www.pnas.org/content/118/8/e2020685118

Provided by Indiana University

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