
UJA COVID-19 IMPACT STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THIS STUDY

In 2020-21, UJA-Federation conducted an in-depth examination of the social, economic, and emotional impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the New York Jewish community. **The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study sheds light on the myriad ways Covid has changed the lives of Jewish New Yorkers, from losses in employment to declines in mental health.** The U.S. Census is prohibited from asking questions about religion, so the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study is the prime source of information about the needs of the Jewish community in the current moment.

The survey collected data from a cross-sectional, representative sample of New York area adults who live in a Jewish household. The geographic scope is the New York eight-county area — the five New York City boroughs, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties. The survey included adults with all levels of observance, religious belief, and belonging to Jewish communal organizations. **The resulting data provide insight into the pressing needs of the New York Jewish community that will help guide decision makers and amplify UJA's recovery efforts, informing communal planning in the wake of the pandemic.**

Below are the key findings from this survey, which highlight the disparate impacts on particularly vulnerable population groups.

KEY FINDINGS

1 **There is significant material hardship and unemployment within the New York Jewish community.**

A quarter of the Jewish community is poor or near poor based on income poverty (23 percent), and nearly one in six adults in Jewish households experienced a worsening of their financial situation due to the pandemic. While there has been a decrease in Jewish poverty since 2011 (when roughly 30 percent of adults were poor or near poor), the level of poverty is still very high. The decrease in poverty from 2011 to today follows a national and New York trend toward a decline in poverty over the past decade as the country rebounded from the 2008 recession. While poverty affects all groups within the Jewish community, Russian-speaking adults, especially those aged 75 and over, experience extraordinarily high rates of poverty. Eighty-four percent of Russian-speaking seniors are poor or near poor. Consistent with past research, Brooklyn emerges as a center of Jewish poverty in New York, although areas popularly considered affluent have substantial poverty as well. About 13 percent of adults in Jewish households in Westchester are poor or near poor, for example. Additionally, the unemployment rate among adults in Jewish households is 12 percent, compared with 10 percent among the general population.

2 **Unprecedented government and philanthropic support have successfully reduced the rates of food and housing insecurity; however, as relief efforts subside, these rates are likely to rise.**

The data in the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study show that government and philanthropic relief measures are staving off severe food insecurity in the community. For example, from March to December 2020, Met Council, the largest distributor of kosher food to the poor in the U.S., distributed three times as much food as it had in all of 2019 and tripled the number of food pantries that it supplied. As the high demand for food persists, Met Council expects to serve twenty million pounds of food in 2021, a 33 percent increase from 2020, and 400 percent of the 2019 amount. Despite this high demand for food resources, in the spring of 2021 about 9 percent of adults in Jewish households report experiencing food insecurity, a testament to the success of the food distribution programs. The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study also found that 4 percent of adults in Jewish households are not up-to-date on their rent or mortgage payments, more evidence of the success of the government and philanthropic relief measures, which have lifted many New Yorkers out of crisis. However, federal support is winding down: unemployment assistance ended in early September in New York, the eviction moratorium is slated to end by early 2022, and the child tax credit expires in December 2021.

KEY FINDINGS

3 The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study is the first representative survey in the nation to provide statistics about social isolation, mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse in the Jewish community, and it is also the most current survey providing data on these topics in New York City. The data show that problems with social isolation, mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse are substantial and have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The survey found that 20 percent of adults in Jewish households experience symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, and 10 percent indicate that they have a substance abuse problem. About 4 percent of adults in Jewish households experience violence in their close, personal relationships. Many indicate that these problems have worsened since the start of the pandemic.

4 The social and economic impacts of the pandemic are widespread, yet they are particularly prevalent among LGBTQ adults in Jewish households; Hispanic, Black, Asian, and other non-white adults in Jewish households; and those who are socially isolated. These differential impacts reflect systemic inequities in housing, education, employment, housing, and health care that the current crisis has exacerbated.

Compared with the overall population, LGBTQ adults in Jewish households, in particular, face high rates of unemployment, worse financial situations, and greater struggles with mental health and social isolation. Consistent with our findings, a substantial body of past research has documented that LGBTQ hardships predate the pandemic and have been disproportionately exacerbated by it. This body of research demonstrates that stigma and discrimination have a significant impact on the economic and health disparities among LGBTQ people and that LGBTQ adults face mental health and substance use problems at higher rates than the general population.¹

KEY FINDINGS

5 Most adults in the Jewish community who experience depression and/or anxiety, violence in their relationships, and substance abuse ARE NOT seeking help.

Half of adults in Jewish households who report symptoms of depression and/or anxiety and almost two-thirds of the victims of violence did not seek, and are not planning to seek, professional help. Most notably, almost nine in ten adults in Jewish households who indicate they have a substance abuse problem are not seeking help.

6 The pandemic has strengthened New Yorkers' attachments to being Jewish.

About 20 percent of Jewish adults indicate that their attachment to being Jewish has increased since the pandemic, while only 3 percent say that it has decreased. Additionally, over half of Jewish adults indicate that being Jewish helps them cope at a time of crisis, either significantly (34 percent) or moderately (19 percent). Institutional attachments have also remained strong throughout the pandemic. Only 3 percent of Jewish New Yorkers report that they stopped being a member of their synagogue since the start of the pandemic.

Study Methodology and Defining Jewish Households

This study relies on an expansive definition of who is a Jew by considering anyone who identifies as a Jew or lives with a self-identified Jew as a member of the Jewish community. For the purposes of this study, a Jewish adult is defined as someone aged 18 or over who self-identifies as Jewish or partially Jewish, either religiously, ethnically, culturally, or because of family

background. This study counts those respondents who identify religiously with both Judaism and another religion, such as Christianity or Buddhism, as Jewish respondents. A household is defined as a Jewish household if it includes one or more Jewish adults ages 18 or over. To learn more about this, please visit our report ["Who counts as Jewish in the survey."](#)

A Note on the Effect of Phone vs Internet Survey

In 2011, we conducted the NY Community Study using telephone surveys, while in 2021 we primarily relied on internet surveys. Responses to survey questions, especially to sensitive questions like income, vary depending

on survey mode. We have to proceed with a degree of caution in comparing 2021 poverty rates and other data to 2011 poverty rates because we don't know if or how the survey mode affected the data.

NOTES

1. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/news/2021/02/11/495675/lessening-pandemics-burden-lgbtq-workers-families/>
<https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-lgbt-peoples-mental-health/>