



POVERTY AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

DURING COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the financial stability of many households. Unemployment soared when many businesses were forced to close, while changes in childcare and public education often required parents to provide additional care for their children. These changes in job situation and other additional burdens have left many households financially insecure and unable to pay

their routine expenses, including food, healthcare, housing, and medication expenses. The impact of the pandemic-induced poverty was not felt equally throughout the community; as such, the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study examines financial hardship by geography and population subgroups.

This report focuses on two main areas:

1 | Overall Poverty

2 | Change in Financial Self-Assessment

Study Methodology and Defining Jewish Households

The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study collected information from a **representative sample of 4,400 New York area adults** who are Jewish or living in a household with one or more Jewish adults to learn more about the ways the coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives and livelihoods of the Jewish community. The broad coverage area included the **five New York City boroughs, as well as Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties**. To learn more about the methodology, you can read our [brief](#) or [detailed methodology report](#).

This study aims to understand the impact of Covid-19 on **all members of the Jewish community**, across all — and regardless of — levels of observance, religious belief, and belonging to Jewish communal organizations.

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 and 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 and over. To learn more about this, please visit our report [“Who counts as Jewish in the survey.”](#)

KEY FINDINGS

1 One in seven adults living in Jewish households is poor and an additional one in ten is near poor

Overall, almost a quarter of Jewish households are either poor or near poor.

2 The near poor struggle to make ends meet nearly as much as the poor

And for some expenditures, such as medical bills, the near poor struggle more than the poor because they do not receive many of the government benefits and services that the poor receive.

3 Poverty is much greater in New York City than in the three suburban counties

In particular, Brooklyn has very high rates of poverty, accounting for 60% of poor and 43% of near-poor respondents.

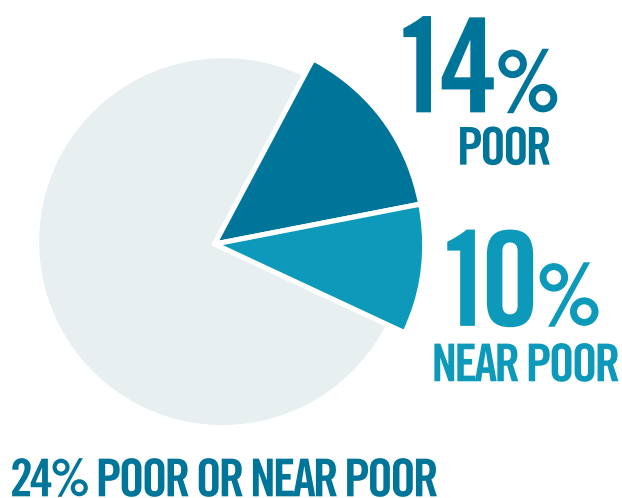
4 The pandemic exacerbated financial hardship

Almost one in six adults in Jewish households experienced a worsening of their financial situation as a result of the pandemic.

SECTION 1

OVERALL POVERTY

FIGURE 1. % living in poor and near-poor households

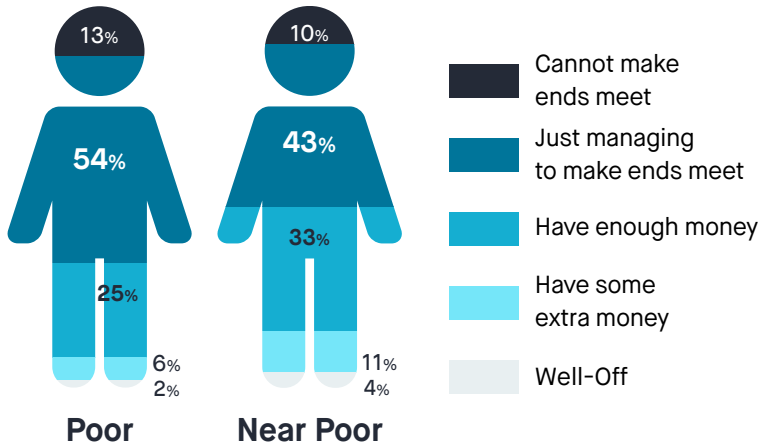


Rather than focusing only on the poor, this report also examines adults living near poverty. **One in seven adults** in Jewish households is **poor (14%)**. An additional **one in ten** Jewish adults is “**near poor**” — living just above the poverty line in households that also struggle to make ends meet and often are not eligible for government benefits and services.

In terms of financial self-assessment (Figure 2), people who are **poor are only slightly more likely to report that they cannot make ends meet** — 13% compared with 10% of the near poor. Very **high rates of both the poor and the near poor report that they are just managing to make ends meet** (54% and 43%, respectively).

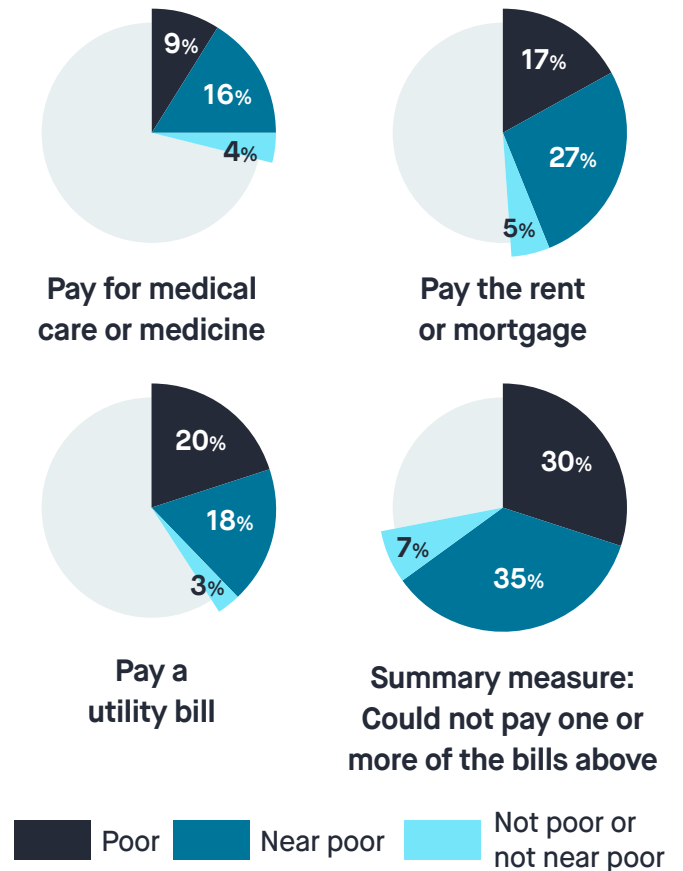
SECTION 1: OVERALL POVERTY

FIGURE 2. Financial Self-Assessment by Poverty Level



The necessity to highlight the vulnerability of the near poor becomes apparent when examining Figure 3. More than one in three near-poor adults in Jewish households say that, since the Covid-19 pandemic began, there were times when they did not have enough money to pay housing, medical, or utility bills. Compared to poor adults in Jewish households, **near-poor adults were more likely to be unable to pay their rent or mortgage expenses (27% versus 17% among the poor), and also more likely to be unable to cover medical expenses (16% versus 9%).**

FIGURE 3. % of Adults who, during the pandemic, were unable to...



How We Measured Poverty and Financial Hardship

In this study, the level of income associated with poverty is based on the minimum needs of a household as a function of household size, with minimum needs defined by the federal poverty guidelines for the New York area in 2020. However, there is widespread recognition that the federal poverty guidelines underestimate poverty in high-cost-of-living areas like New York City because they do not sufficiently account for differences in regional living costs.

Therefore, this study uses a more expansive definition of poverty and considers a household whose annual income is less than **150% of the federal poverty guideline** to be a poor household. This poverty level is hardly generous. For example, 150% of the federal poverty guideline translates to a household income of \$39,300 for a family of four in New York. The table below illustrates the 2020 poverty levels for different points in the federal poverty guidelines.

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Household Size	2020 Poverty Guidelines	100% FPG	150% FPG	200% FPG	250% FPG	300% FPG
1	\$12,760	\$12,800	\$19,200	\$25,600	\$32,000	\$38,400
2	\$17,240	\$17,300	\$25,950	\$34,600	\$43,250	\$51,900
3	\$21,720	\$21,800	\$32,700	\$43,600	\$54,500	\$65,400
4	\$26,200	\$26,200	\$39,300	\$52,400	\$65,500	\$78,600
5	\$30,680	\$30,700	\$46,050	\$61,400	\$76,750	\$92,100
6	\$35,160	\$35,200	\$52,800	\$70,400	\$88,000	\$105,600
7	\$39,640	\$39,700	\$59,550	\$79,400	\$99,250	\$119,100
8	\$44,120	\$44,200	\$66,300	\$88,400	\$110,500	\$132,600
9	\$48,600	\$48,600	\$72,900	\$97,200	\$121,500	\$145,800
10	\$53,080	\$53,100	\$79,650	\$106,200	\$132,750	\$159,300

Source: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/2020-poverty-guidelines>

In addition, this study also examines the *near poor*, defined as households whose annual income is **between 150% and 250% of the 2020 federal poverty guideline**.

Thus, a family of four would be considered near poor with household income between \$39,300 and \$65,500.

Both the poor and the near poor are crucial to the story of Jewish poverty in the New York area. While the focus is often on the poor, the plight of the near poor is also serious. The near poor are often not eligible for the same social service benefits that the poor can receive, leaving them without a social safety net.

A major limitation of the federal poverty guidelines, which are based on household income only, is that they ignore other factors that can influence the overall financial situation of a household and do not account for the impact of government benefits and assistance.

The federal poverty guidelines also overlook how people perceive their financial and/or material situation. In order to better understand how financial situations changed because of the pandemic, we include two subjective measures of financial hardship — current financial self-assessment (Question 1) and financial self-assessment before the pandemic (Question 2) — from which we gauge change:

Question 1:

Currently, which of these statements best describes your (household's) financial situation?

Answer categories: cannot make ends meet, just managing to make ends meet, have enough money, have some extra money, well off

Question 2:

In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, which of these statements best described your (household's) financial situation?

Answer categories: could not make ends meet, just managed to make ends meet, had enough money, had some extra money, well off

SECTION 1: OVERALL POVERTY

Regional Differences

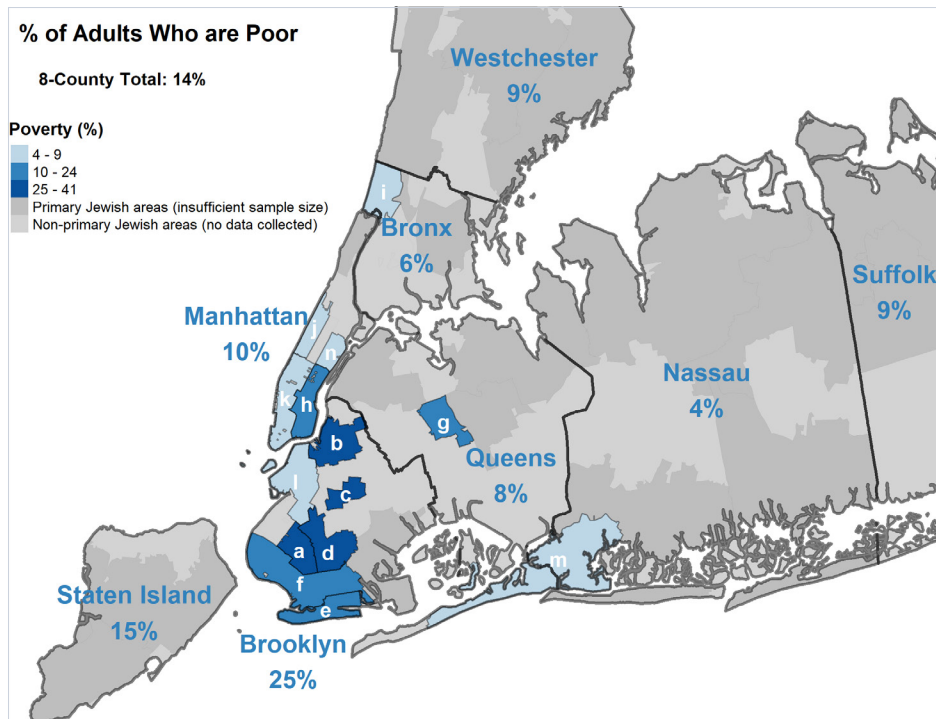
The scale of Jewish poverty in the eight-county New York area is significant. Altogether, almost a quarter of adults in Jewish households are poor (14%) or near poor (10%). Poverty is greater in the New York City counties (17%) compared to suburban counties (7%). This divide also holds true for near-poor respondents: 1 in 8 of respondents in New York City is near poor (12%), while only 1 in 20 of suburban adults is near poor (5%).

FIGURE 4. % living in poor and near-poor households, by county

	Poor	Near poor	Not poor or near poor
Bronx	6%	16%	78%
Brooklyn	25%	12%	63%
Nassau	4%	2%	94%
Manhattan	10%	9%	81%
Queens	8%	13%	79%
Staten Island	15%	6%	80%
Suffolk	9%	10%	81%
Westchester	9%	4%	87%

Jewish poverty is not distributed uniformly across the New York area. There are significant disparities in poverty incidence both at the county and the neighborhood level. In particular, and consistent with past research, Brooklyn emerges as the center of Jewish poverty in New York. A quarter of adults in Brooklyn are poor and another 12% are near poor. This means that 37% of Jewish adults in Brooklyn are either poor or near poor. Viewed differently, Brooklyn includes 60% of all poor adults and 43% of all near-poor adults in the New York area.

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Additionally, both the **Coney Island and Bensonhurst** neighborhoods, which have a high incidence of Russian-speaking households, have high percentages of poor and near-poor adults.

The incidence of poverty on Staten Island is also quite high (15%). While poverty is lowest in the Bronx (6%), more than one in five adults in Jewish households are near poor or poor there. In contrast, Nassau (6%) and Westchester (13%) have the lowest share of those who are poor or near poor.

Neighborhood identifier	Neighborhood name	% Poor	% Near Poor
a	Borough Park	41%	16%
b	Williamsburg	32%	10%
c	Crown Heights	30%	12%
d	Flatbush/Midwood/Kensington	29%	12%
e	Coney Island/Brighton Beach/Sheepshead Bay	24%	15%
f	Bensonhurst/Gravesend/Bay Ridge/Kings Bay/Madison	20%	13%
g	Forest Hills/Rego Park/Kew Gardens Area	18%	10%
h	Lower Manhattan East	12%	8%
i	Upper West Side	9%	5%
j	Riverdale/Kingsbridge	9%	9%
k	Lower Manhattan West	5%	11%
l	The Rockaways/Five Towns	5%	4%
m	Brownstone Brooklyn	5%	1%
n	Upper East Side	4%	5%

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Social and Demographic Patterns

Poverty rates are particularly high among three groups of adults in Jewish households: **Haredi respondents, adults in Russian-speaking households, and Hispanic or non-white respondents.**

Consistent with the findings of the 2011 Jewish Community Study of New York, the two groups in the Jewish community most affected by poverty are the Haredi and Russian-speaking Jews. More than half of Russian-speaking households in the Jewish community are poor or near poor, and, similarly, just about half of the Haredi community is as well. Within the Russian-speaking community, adults aged 75 and over experience extraordinarily high rates of poverty. Eighty-four percent of Russian-speaking seniors are poor or near poor. Viewed differently, among all adults aged 75 and over in the Jewish community who are poor or near poor, about half (45%) are Russian speakers.

FIGURE 5. % who are poor or near poor

		Poor	Near poor	Not poor or not near poor
Denomination	Non-Orthodox	10%	8%	82%
	All Orthodox	29%	12%	58%
Race/ethnicity	Haredi	36%	13%	51%
	Non-Hispanic white	13%	9%	78%
	Hispanic, Black, Asian, or other non-white group	18%	18%	64%
Language spoken at home most often ¹	English	10%	9%	82%
	Russian	38%	13%	49%
	Yiddish	60%	17%	23%
Age	18-64	14%	9%	77%
	65-74	9%	10%	81%
	75 and over	17%	10%	73%
Speak mostly Russian at home by Age	18-64	25%	14%	61%
	65-74	27%	11%	62%
	75 and over	71%	14%	16%

Within the Haredi community, those who mostly speak Yiddish at home rather than English have exceedingly high rates of poverty: about 78% are poor or near poor.² The Haredi Jews who primarily speak Yiddish at home represent the most traditional members of the community and have very low levels of secular education compared to other Jews. Only 5% have a 4-year college degree or higher compared to 26% of all Haredi adults and 64% of all adults in Jewish households. It is also worth noting that almost one-third (31%) of Haredi Jewish households have four or more children and 14% have six or more children.

Finally, it is worth noting that **Hispanic, Black, Asian, and other non-white adults** in Jewish households (36%) are **more likely to be poor or near poor** than their non-Hispanic white counterparts (22%), mirroring the large racial disparities in poverty in the United States.

CHANGE IN FINANCIAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Nearly 1 in 6 adults in Jewish households experienced a worsening of their financial situation as a result of the pandemic.

The percentage of adults who **could not make ends meet or were just able to make ends meet increased by six percentage points as a result of the pandemic.** At the same time, the share of households that report having some **extra money or being well-off decreased by three percentage points.** While these changes might not seem large at first glance, they indicate a substantial shift in household finances due to the pandemic.

Non-White, LGBTQ, and unemployed adults in Jewish households were more likely to experience a worsening of their financial situation since the start of the pandemic.

More than one in five (22%) Hispanic, Black, Asian, or other non-white adults in Jewish households say their **financial situation got worse** during the pandemic, compared to just 15% among non-Hispanic white adults. Almost **a quarter of LGBTQ adults** experienced a worsening of their financial situation as a result of the pandemic, well above the 15% rate of the non-LGBTQ population. Unsurprisingly, **more than a third (36%) of the unemployed** say their household financial situation deteriorated since the start of the pandemic.

FIGURE 6. Change in Financial Situation before pandemic to now



FIGURE 7. % whose financial situation got worse since the start of the pandemic

		Worse financial situation
Race/Ethnicity	Hispanic, Black, Asian, or other non-white	22%
	Non-Hispanic white	15%
LGBTQ	Non-LGBTQ	15%
	LGBTQ	22%
Employment	Employed	15%
	Unemployed	36%

NOTES

1. Shows only languages with sufficient sample size. This question asked about the language most often spoken at home. Thus, Russian speakers who now use mostly English at home are included in the English category.
2. Virtually all Yiddish-speaking respondents in this survey are Haredi.