

Stimulus Use, Income, and Food Insecurity During COVID-19

Selena T. Garrison, University of Florida¹
Martie Gillen, University of Florida²

Introduction

More than a year and a half after COVID-19 first emerged in the United States, lasting effects were experienced by businesses, schools, families, and social structures. For many families, unemployment or reduction in hours worked due to COVID-19 brought devastating financial issues. In August 2021, the U.S. unemployment rate was 5% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). In line with ACCI's mission of enhancing consumer and family economic well-being, the purpose of this current descriptive study was to examine differences in food insecurity among Florida families with children based on household income level and stimulus receipt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Horowitz et al. (2021) found that while higher-income adults were much more likely to have a financially improved situation due to the pandemic, lower-income adults are much more likely to have gone into debt or lost a job. In the United States, 9% of adults reported sometimes or often not having enough to eat in the last seven days during the pandemic. When breaking these results down by parenting status, 11% of adults with children and eight percent of adults without children reported food insecurity (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2021). Comparatively, in all of 2019, 3% of American adults reported not having enough to eat at any point (Keith-Jennings, 2020).

In the midst of the pandemic, economic relief came to families in the form of three separate stimulus payments. The first round of payments was authorized under the CARES Act, which included \$1,200 per qualifying adult (up to \$2,400 for couples), as well as \$500 per dependent child. The second round of payments, authorized under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, included \$600 per qualifying adult (up to \$1,200 for couples), as well as \$600 per dependent child. The third round of payments, authorized under the America Rescue Plan, included \$1,400 per qualifying adult (up to \$2,800 for couples), as well as \$1,400 per eligible child (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2021). This study contributes to the current body of research by examining food insecurity among Florida families with children during COVID-19, based on both household income level and stimulus receipt use.

Method

The population of interest for this study was Florida residents, age 18 or older, who were parents or guardians of minor children (i.e., 18 years of age or younger). Data was collected in June of 2021 via an online survey administered through Qualtrics from 525 adult parents/guardians of minor children who reside in a southeastern state in the U.S. The survey design is mixed methods.

Results

Of 525 respondents, 19.4% indicated that their total family income from all sources before taxes in 2020 was \$24,999 or less, 19.8% between \$25,000 and \$49,999, 16.6% between \$50,000 and \$74,999, 32.8% between \$75,000 and \$149,999, 9.0% between \$150,000 and \$249,999, and 2.5% \$250,000 or more. In indicating whether they had received or expected to receive COVID-19 stimulus funding, 71.8% of respondents indicated that they had received funding, 20.2% indicated that they had not, and 8.0% indicated that they were not sure.

Respondents were asked if, during the pandemic, the statement, "The food that I/we bought just didn't last, and I/we didn't have money to get more," was often true, sometimes true, or never true, and 42.9% indicated this was often true or sometimes true. Significant differences were indicated among respondents based on income, $X^2(10, N=525) = 79.8, p < .01$ (Table 1). No significant differences were indicated among respondents based on stimulus receipt, $X^2(4, N=525) = 4.6, p > .05$. When asked if, during the pandemic, the statement, "I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals," was often true,

¹ Selena T. Garrison (selenah@ufl.edu), PhD Candidate, Family, Youth and Community Sciences

² Martie Gillen (mjgillen@ufl.edu), Associate Professor, Family, Youth and Community Sciences

sometimes true, or never true, 39.6% indicated this was often true or sometimes true. Significant differences were found based on household income, $X^2(10, N=525) = 118.2, p < .01$ (Table 2), while no significant differences were found based on stimulus receipt, $X^2(4, N=525) = 10.6, p > .05$. When asked if, during the pandemic, “Did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food,” 28.2% indicated they had. Significant differences were found based on household income, $X^2(10, N=525) = 107.5, p < .01$ (Table 3), while no significant differences were found based on stimulus receipt, $X^2(4, N=525) = 8.5, p > .05$. When asked if, during the pandemic, “Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food,” 30.3% indicated they had. Significant differences were found based on household income, $X^2(10, N=525) = 97.9, p < .01$, (Table 4), while no significant differences were found based on stimulus receipt, $X^2(4, N=525) = 6.4, p > .05$. When asked if, during the pandemic, “Were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food,” 30.3% indicated they had. Significant differences were found based on household income, $X^2(10, N=525) = 79.8, p < .01$, (Table 5), while no significant differences were found based on stimulus receipt, $X^2(4, N=525) = 3.4, p > .05$. When asked if, during the pandemic, “Did you cut the size of your meals or skip meals so that your child(ren) could eat,” 24.4% indicated they had. Significant differences were found based on household income, $X^2(10, N=525) = 101.5, p < .01$, (Table 6), while no significant differences were found based on stimulus receipt, $X^2(4, N=525) = 6.6, p > .05$.

This study provides evidence of widespread food insecurity among Florida families with children during the pandemic. While significant differences in food insecurity were found based on income, no such differences were found based on stimulus receipt, indicating a potential disconnect between policy and practice. Research should be conducted to examine whether stimulus payments are having the intended impact on lower-income Floridians. Additionally, further research could be done to examine other ways of reducing food insecurity aside from stimulus payments.

Table 1
Household Income x Food Didn’t Last and Didn’t Have Money for More

Household Income Level	The food that I/we bought just didn’t last, and I/we didn’t have money to get more.			
	Often True	Sometimes True	Never True	Total
\$24,999 or less	4.8% (25)	9.5% (50)	5.1% (27)	19.4% (102)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	2.5% (13)	7.6% (40)	9.7% (51)	19.8% (104)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1.0% (5)	4.0% (21)	11.6% (61)	16.6% (87)
\$75,000 to \$149,999	1.3% (7)	7.2% (38)	24.2% (127)	32.8% (172)
\$150,000 to \$249,999	1.0% (5)	3.6% (19)	4.4% (23)	9.0% (47)
\$250,000 or more	0.2% (1)	0.2% (1)	2.1% (11)	2.5% (13)
Total	10.7% (56)	32.2% (169)	57.1% (300)	100% (525)

Note. $X^2(10, N = 525) = 79.8, p < .01$.

Table 2
Household Income x Couldn’t Afford Balanced Meals

Household Income Level	I/we couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.			
	Often True	Sometimes True	Never True	Total
\$24,999 or less	6.1% (32)	8.4% (44)	5.0% (26)	19.4% (102)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	4.0% (21)	6.5% (34)	9.3% (49)	19.8% (104)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1.1% (6)	4.0% (21)	11.4% (60)	16.6% (87)
\$75,000 to \$149,999	1.0% (5)	4.4% (23)	27.4% (144)	32.8% (172)

\$150,000 to \$249,999	0.4% (2)	3.2% (17)	5.3% (28)	9.0% (47)
\$250,000 or more	0	0.6% (3)	1.9% (10)	2.5% (13)
Total	12.6% (66)	27.0% (142)	60.4% (317)	100% (525)

Note. $X^2(10, N = 525) = 118.2, p < .01$.

Table 3
Household Income x Cut Size of Meals or Skip Meals

Household Income Level	Did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?			Total
	Yes	No	I Don't Know	
\$24,999 or less	11.6% (61)	7.2% (38)	0.6% (3)	19.4% (102)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	8.6% (45)	10.5% (55)	0.8% (4)	19.8% (104)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	3.8% (20)	12.6% (66)	0.2% (1)	16.6% (87)
\$75,000 to \$149,999	2.9% (15)	28.8% (151)	1.1% (6)	32.8% (172)
\$150,000 to \$249,999	1.0% (5)	7.8% (41)	0.2% (1)	9.0% (47)
\$250,000 or more	0.4% (2)	1.9% (10)	0.2% (1)	2.5% (13)
Total	28.2% (148)	68.8% (361)	3.0% (16)	100% (525)

Note. $X^2(10, N = 525) = 107.5, p < .01$.

Table 4
Household Income x Ate Less Than Should

Household Income Level	Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?			Total
	Yes	No	I Don't Know	
\$24,999 or less	11.6% (61)	7.6% (40)	0.02% (1)	19.4% (102)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	9.3% (49)	9.9% (53)	0.04% (2)	19.8% (104)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	3.6% (19)	12.4% (65)	0.06% (3)	16.6% (87)
\$75,000 to \$149,999	3.6% (19)	28.6% (150)	0.06% (3)	32.8% (172)
\$150,000 to \$249,999	1.7% (9)	7.2% (38)	0	9.0% (47)
\$250,000 or more	0.04% (2)	1.9% (10)	0.02% (1)	2.5% (13)
Total	30.3% (159)	67.8% (356)	1.9% (10)	100% (525)

Note. $X^2(10, N = 525) = 97.9, p < .01$.

Table 5
Household Income x Hungry But Didn't Eat

Household Income Level	Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
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	Yes	No	I Don't Know	Total
\$24,999 or less	9.9% (52)	9.3% (49)	0.2% (1)	19.4% (102)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	7.2% (38)	12.2% (64)	0.4% (2)	19.8% (104)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	2.3% (12)	13.9% (73)	0.4% (2)	16.6% (87)
\$75,000 to \$149,999	3.0% (16)	29.1% (153)	0.6% (3)	32.8% (172)
\$150,000 to \$249,999	1.5% (8)	7.4% (39)	0	9.0% (47)
\$250,000 or more	0.3% (2)	1.9% (10)	0.2% (1)	2.5% (13)
Total	24.4% (128)	73.9% (388)	1.7% (9)	100% (525)

Note. $X^2(10, N = 525) = 79.8, p < .01$.

Table 6

Household Income x Cut Size of Meals or Skip Meals for Children

Household Income Level	Did you cut the size of your meals or skip meals so that your child(ren) could eat?			
	Yes	No	I Don't Know	Total
\$24,999 or less	11.8% (62)	7.0% (37)	0.6% (3)	19.4% (102)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	10.1% (53)	9.3% (49)	0.4% (2)	19.8% (104)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	4.6% (24)	12.0% (63)	0	16.6% (87)
\$75,000 to \$149,999	4.6% (24)	28.0% (147)	0.2% (1)	32.8% (172)
\$150,000 to \$249,999	1.5% (8)	7.4% (39)	0	9.0% (47)
\$250,000 or more	0.2% (1)	2.1% (11)	0.2% (1)	2.5% (13)
Total	24.4% (128)	73.9% (388)	1.7% (9)	100% (525)

Note. $X^2(10, N = 525) = 101.5, p < .01$.

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