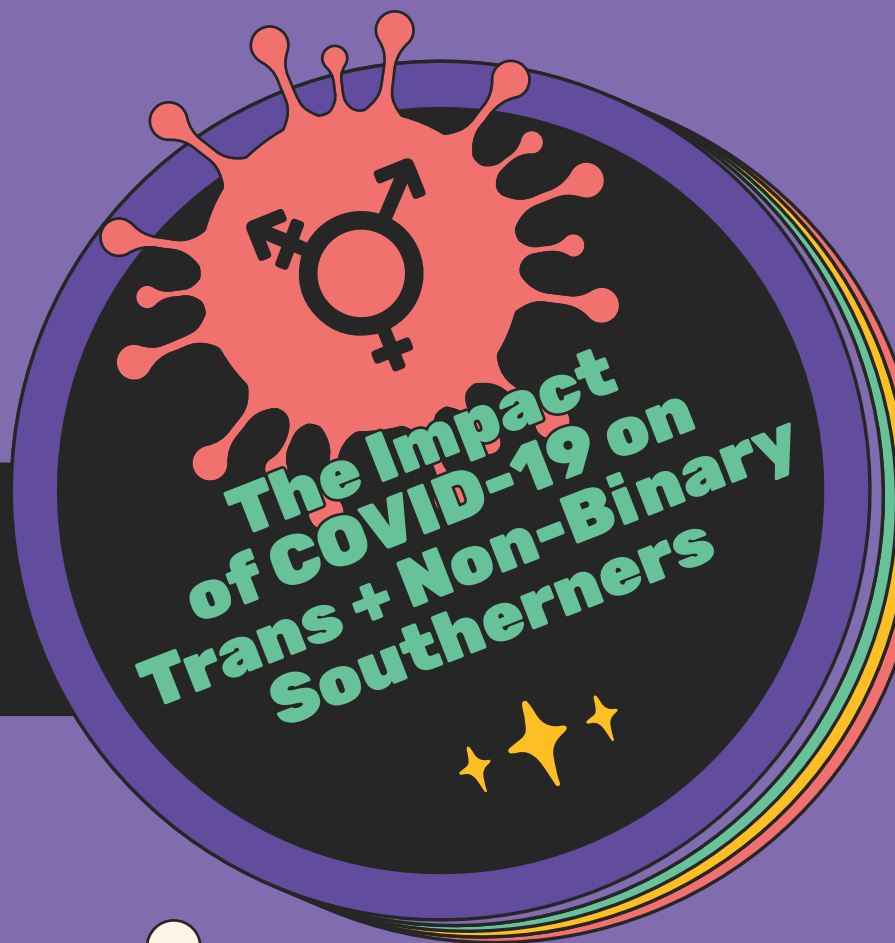


Disproportionate Disadvantage:



Research Partners



Kenyon

gender

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**SOUTHERN
EQUALITY
RESEARCH &
POLICY
CENTER**

CAMPAIGN FOR
SOUTHERN
EQUALITY

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Introduction

More than 500,000 transgender and non-binary people¹ live in the U.S. Southeast, making the region home to more than 35% of all trans people in the country.²

Under ordinary circumstances, our community experiences discrimination and poor treatment in a variety of spaces. Trans and non-binary Southerners are limited in their options for affirming and reliable mental and physical healthcare; they often feel alienated or experience bullying at school, in their neighborhoods, or in their faith communities; and, sadly, many trans and non-binary Southerners do not feel supported or accepted at home with their families. These experiences often lead to trans Southerners carrying a heavier burden of negative mental and physical health outcomes.³ Simultaneously, these experiences limit social mobility and, at times, contribute to disproportionate economic instability.⁴

Under extraordinary circumstances, such as the coronavirus pandemic, these disparities become more pronounced, and others arise that negatively impact our community's quality of life, mental and physical health, and overall well-being across the region.⁵ Since the onset of the pandemic, it has been clear that individuals were not equal in their chances of being directly and indirectly affected by the virus. For example, income and type of employment; access to social support and community; neighborhood and living conditions; access to healthcare, food, and housing; and the ability to social distance are all factors that contribute to exposure to COVID-19, dying from the virus, or being otherwise negatively affected by the coronavirus pandemic.⁶

The U.S. Southeast is a region marked by its religious conservatism, high rates of poverty, poor public social infrastructure, and high rates of chronic health conditions. These factors led to the South's increased vulnerability to the coronavirus pandemic⁷ and have contributed to the widespread rejection of public health guidance throughout the region, from community members to elected officials.⁸ The South is also a region that is marked by its anti-LGBTQ policies, rhetoric, and culture.

There has been very limited research into the experiences of the coronavirus pandemic among transgender people. As we transition to a new normal of living with COVID-19, it is vital that we understand the impact that the pandemic has already had and the impact that its personal and social consequences will have on the well-being of trans and non-binary people throughout the South. In doing so, we hope that advocacy organizations, non-profits, social service providers, and other stakeholders in the South are better equipped to develop evidence-based interventions to allocate resources in ways that are most beneficial to trans and non-binary Southerners during this crisis and the next.

¹ Our questionnaire allowed participants to specify their gender identity as well as their identification with transgender as a category. While many non-binary people in our study do identify with transgender as a category, almost half do not. While the authors of this report understand non-binary people as members of the transgender community, we also understand that not all non-binary people identify as transgender. Thus, our analysis covers Trans Men & Trans Women; Non-Binary People; and Cisgender People. When speaking of the community broadly, we use the term "trans" to refer to all people who identify as transgender, including non-binary people who identify as transgender.

² Flores, A.R., J.L.Herman, G.J. Gates, and Brown, T.N.T., 2016. *How Many Adults Identify as Transgender in the United States?* The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law.

³ Harless, C., Nanney, M., Johnson, A.H., Polaski, A., and Beach-Ferrara, J., 2019. *The report of the 2019 southern LGBTQ health survey*. Asheville, NC: Campaign for Southern Equality.

⁴ *Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being Transgender in America*

⁵ *Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 Among Transgender Adults in the US*. 2020. The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law.

⁶ Orgera, K., and Garfield, R. Rudowitz, 2021. *Implications of COVID-19 for Social Determinants of Health*. Kaiser Family Foundation

⁷ Johnston, Christian D., and Chen, R., 2020. *The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on the Southern United States*. Journal of Comparative Family Studies 51:3-4, 314-323

⁸ Vestal, C., 2020. *The South May See the Largest Share of Coronavirus Misery*. PEW



The Survey

Between August 1, 2020, and February 1, 2021, 1,079 transgender and non-binary Southerners completed an online survey aimed at understanding the consequences of the pandemic on LGBTQ people's experiences at home, at work, and in their communities.

Participants volunteered information about their background, their experience with COVID-19, their access to safety and care during this time, and the impact of the pandemic on their access to vital resources and services.

In order to recruit participants, we utilized a convenience and snowball sampling technique. We recruited various LGBTQ and allied advocacy groups throughout the region to assist in sharing the survey. The community organization in the region with the most referrals received a \$500 stipend from Gender Benders for their work in supporting LGBTQ people who are affected by the coronavirus pandemic. We simultaneously promoted the survey on social media through targeted advertising on Facebook and Instagram. This method of recruitment took advantage of Facebook's robust algorithm to promote the survey among LGBTQ people in 13 Southern States. This allowed us to access LGBTQ Southerners who were not connected to a community organization, expanding the diversity of our sample. Throughout the data collection process, the research team monitored participant demographics and adjusted the targeted sampling and outreach as needed to achieve the most diverse sample possible. The demographics of the LGBTQ Southerners who participated in our research are depicted in the following pages.

Our analysis is focused on the differences in physical health, mental health, and well-being experiences among trans men and trans women, non-binary people, and cisgender LGBTQ Southerners. Here are some key takeaways that we explore in more depth in the next few pages.

Research Team

Principal Investigators

*Austin H Johnson
Ivy Hill*

Project Management

*Cameron Henn
Roc Rochon*

Data Analysis

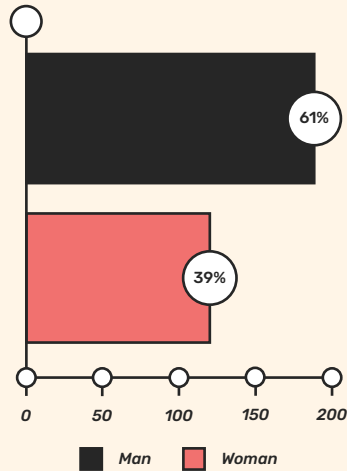
Abigail Bowen

Report Design by Lake Ashlee

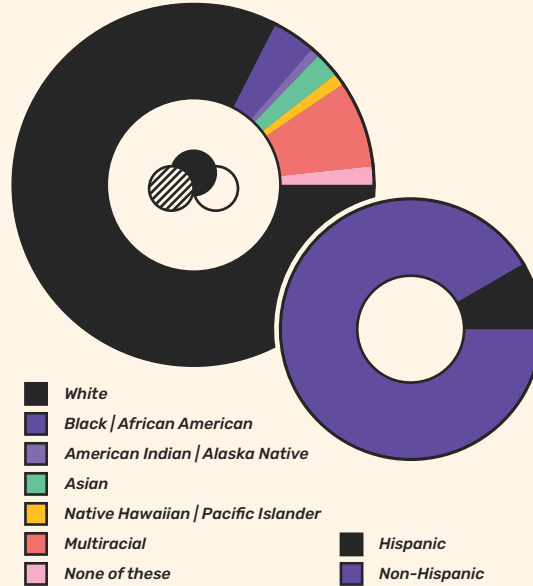
Participant Demographics

Trans Women + Trans Men

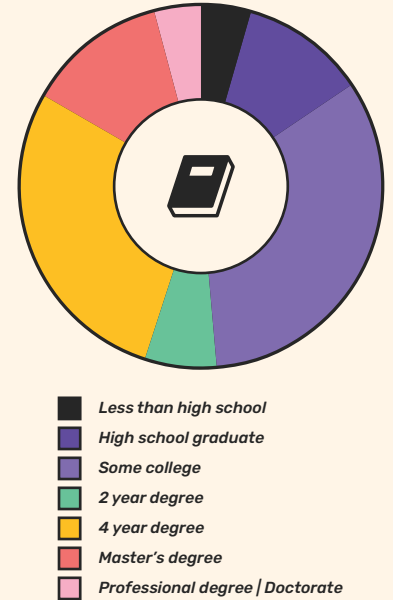
Gender



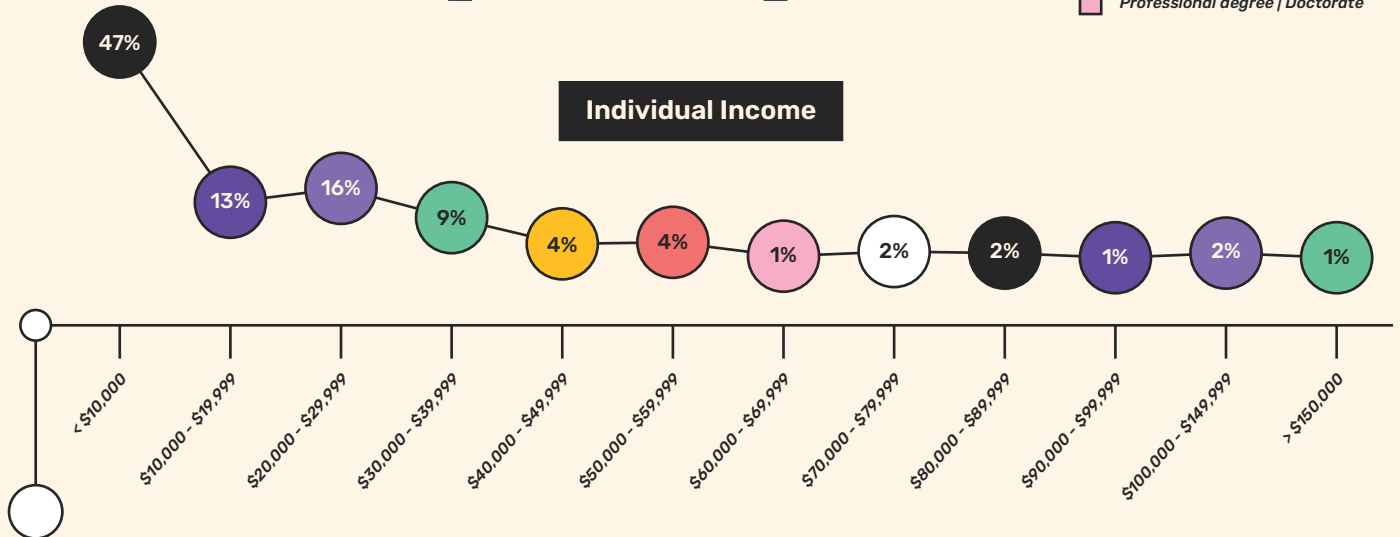
Race



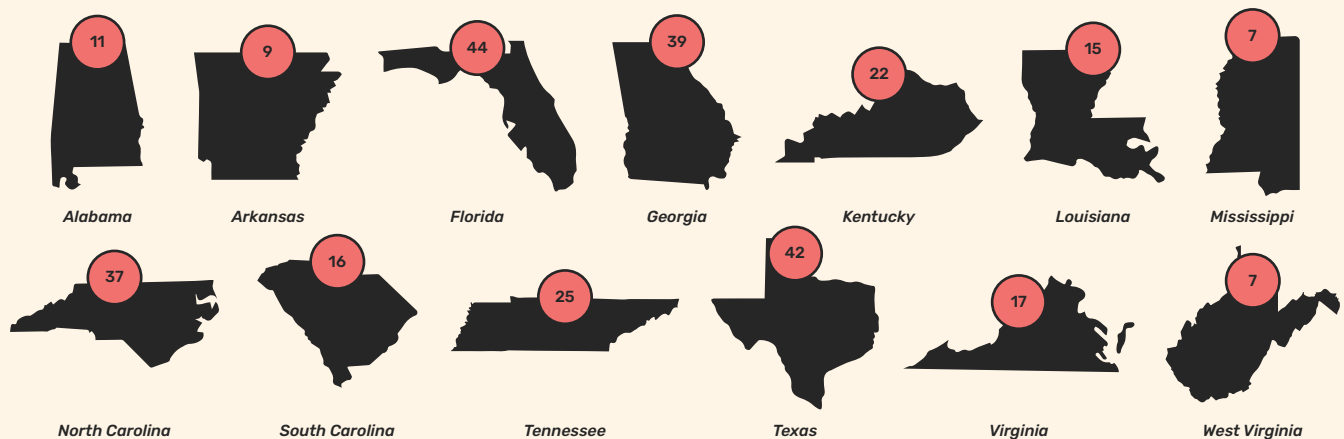
Education



Individual Income



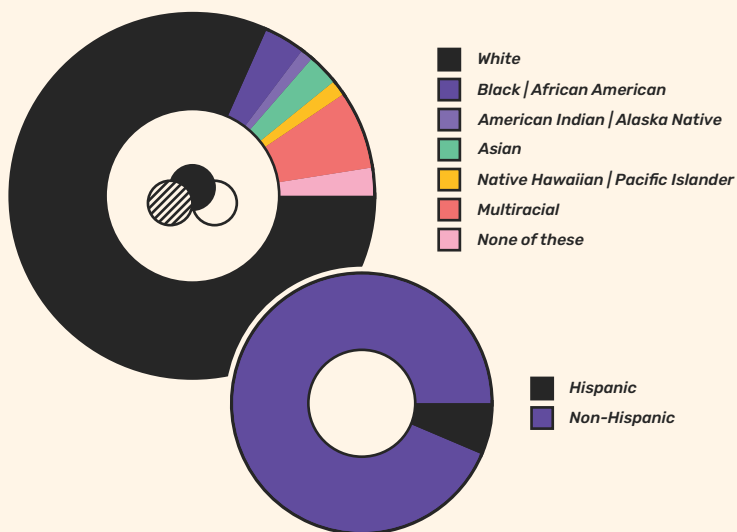
State



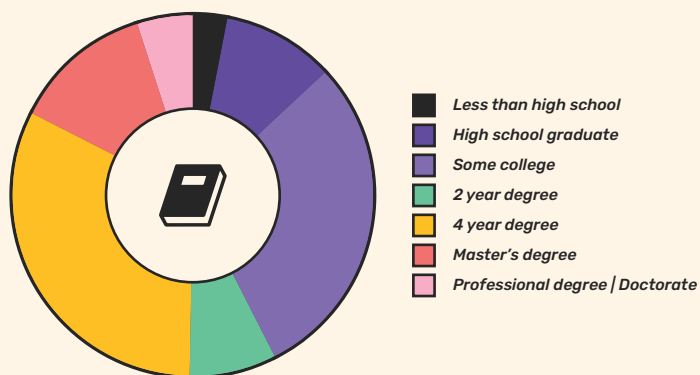
Participant Demographics

Non-Binary Southerners

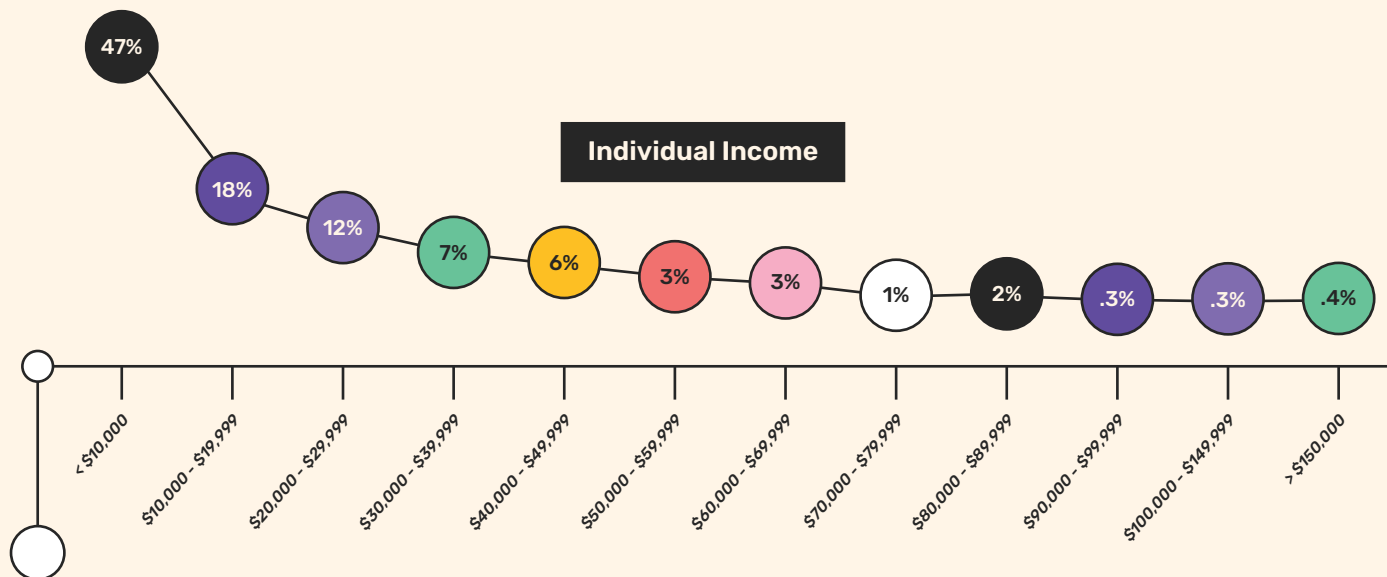
Race



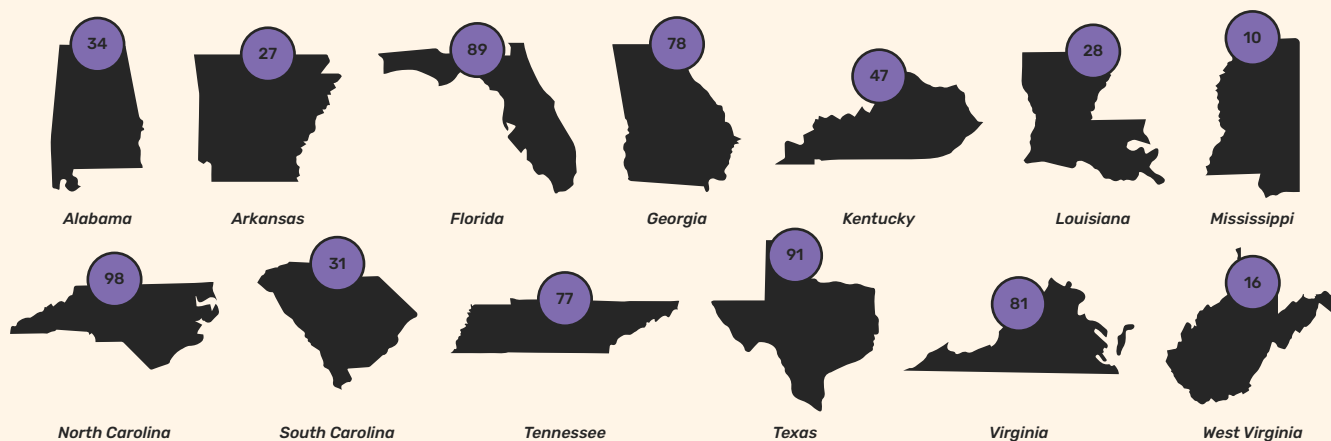
Education



Individual Income



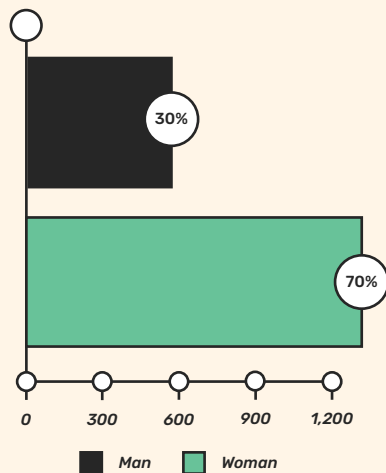
State



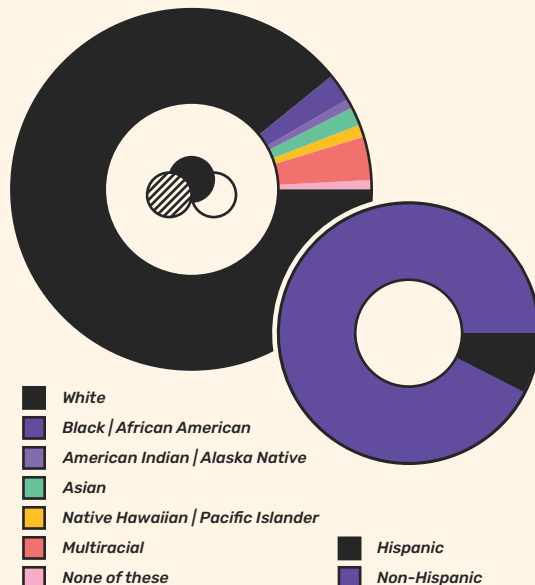
Participant Demographics

Cisgender Southerners

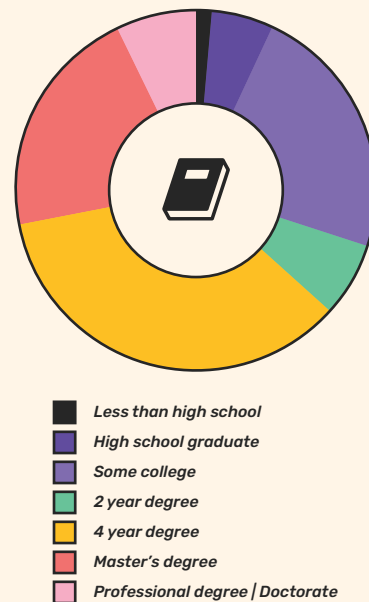
Gender



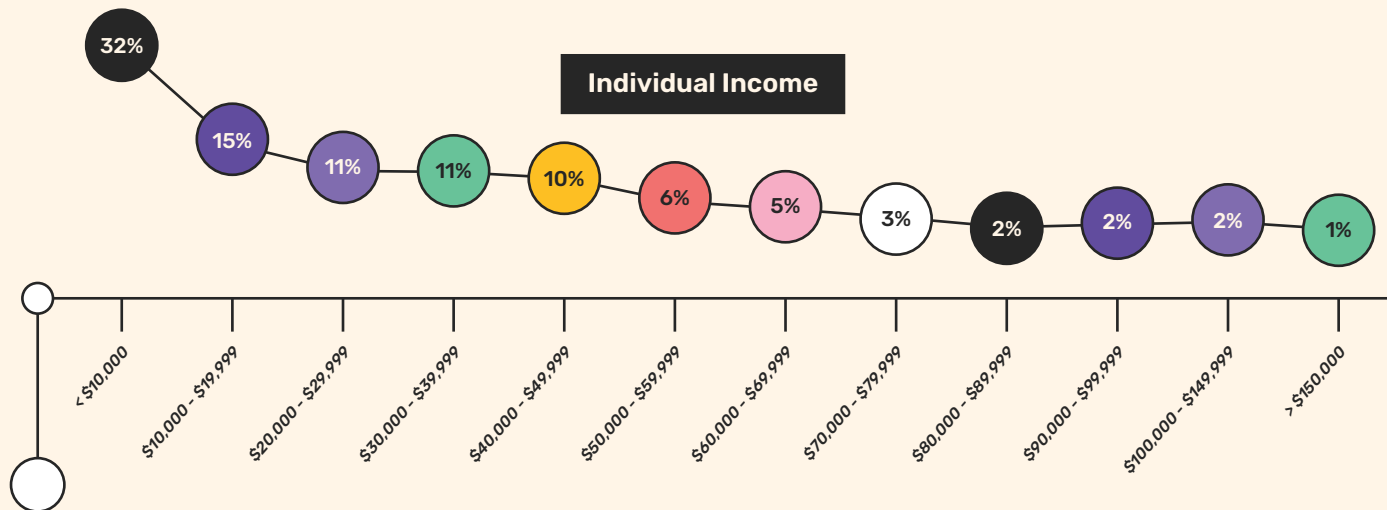
Race



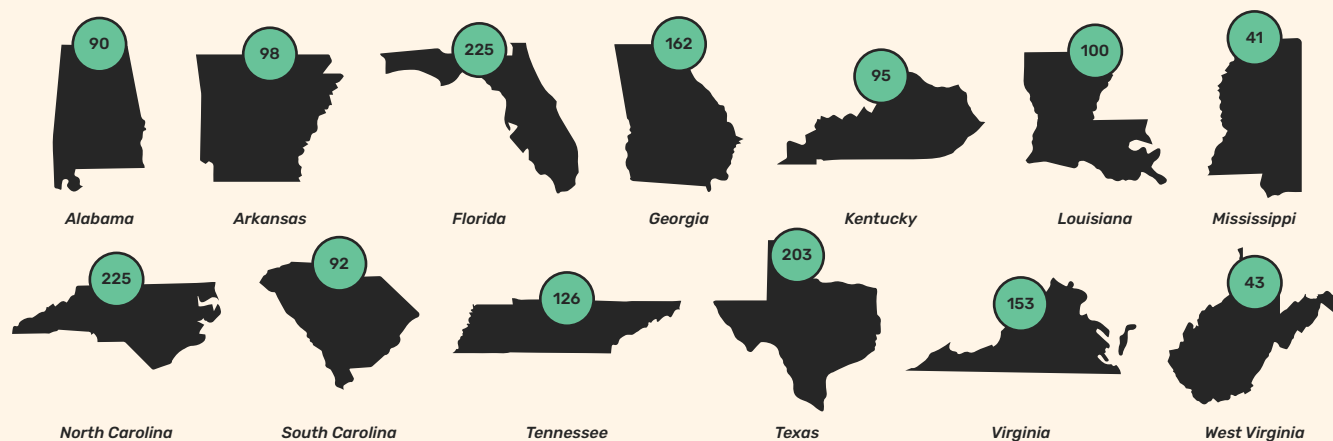
Education



Individual Income



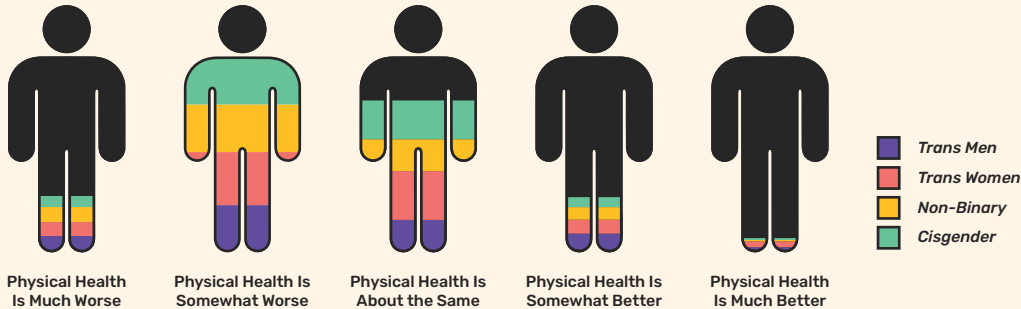
State



Key Takeaways

Physical Health

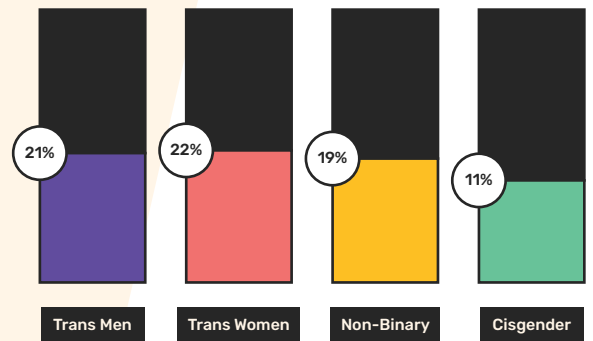
Change to Overall Physical Health During the Coronavirus Pandemic



Trans + non-binary participants were more likely to report a disruption in healthcare or an inability to access prescription medications than cisgender participants.

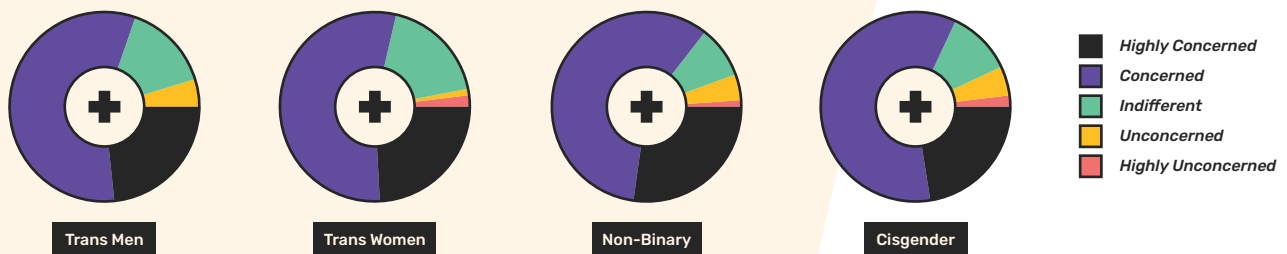
LGBTQ Southerners, across the board, report that their physical health **declined during the pandemic.**

Percent of Individuals Whose Access to Care Has Been Affected



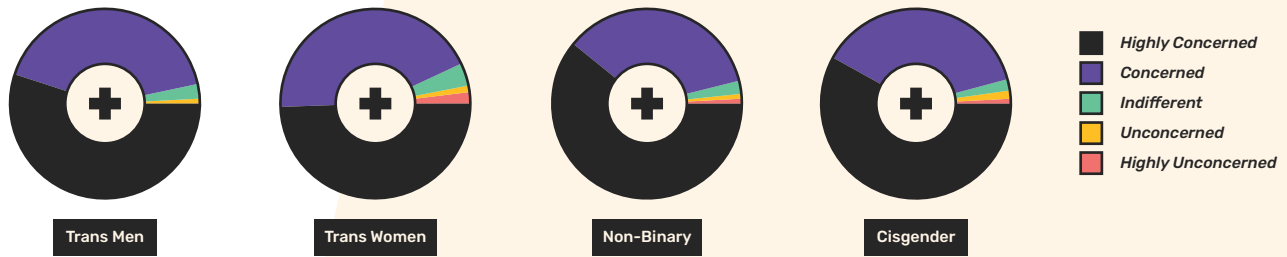
Mental Health

How Concerned Are You About Your Health as It Relates to COVID-19?

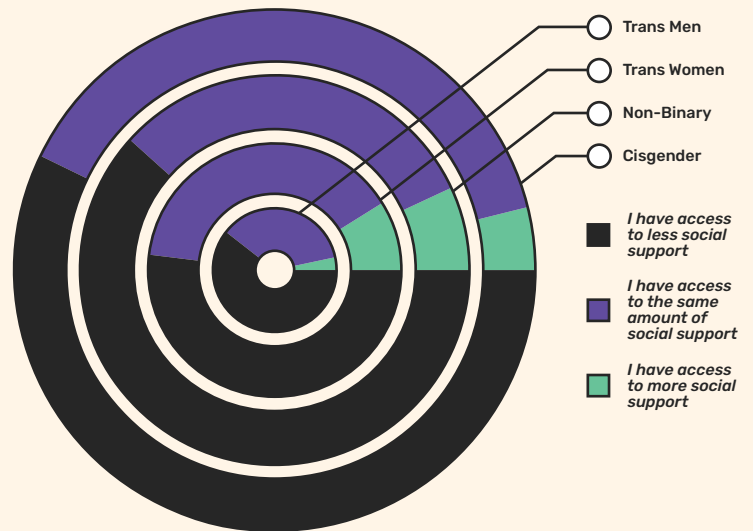


LGBTQ Southerners report that their stress has heightened during the pandemic, especially related to concern for their health and the health of their loved ones, and their social support has declined.

How Concerned Are You About Your Friends' + Family Members' Health as It Relates to COVID-19?

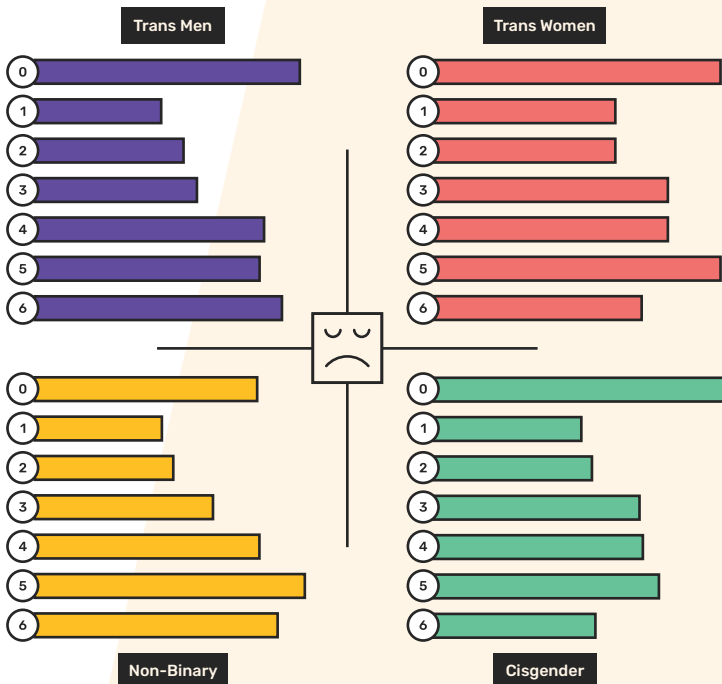


How Has Your Social Support Been Affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic?

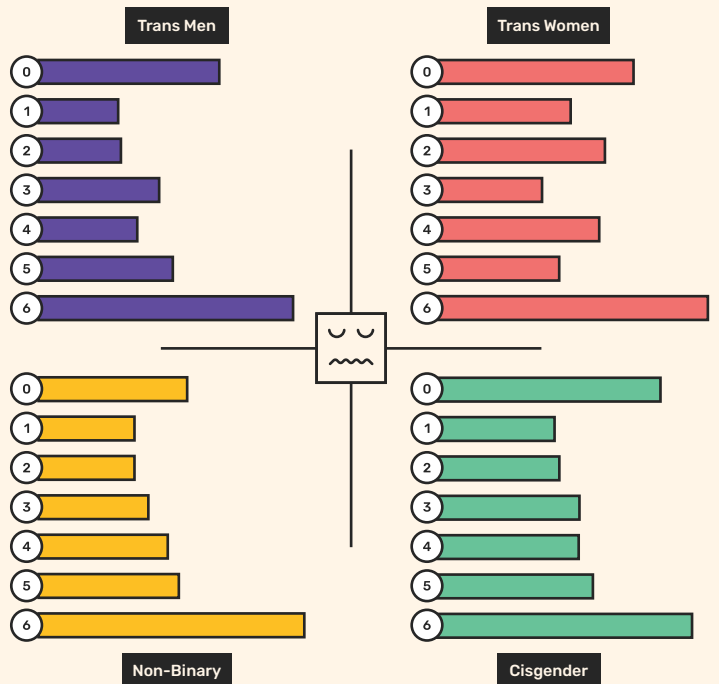


Trans + non-binary participants reported more stress and more loss of social support during the pandemic and scored higher on both the depression and anxiety scales than cisgender participants.

Number of Depressive Symptoms Experienced Since the Onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic



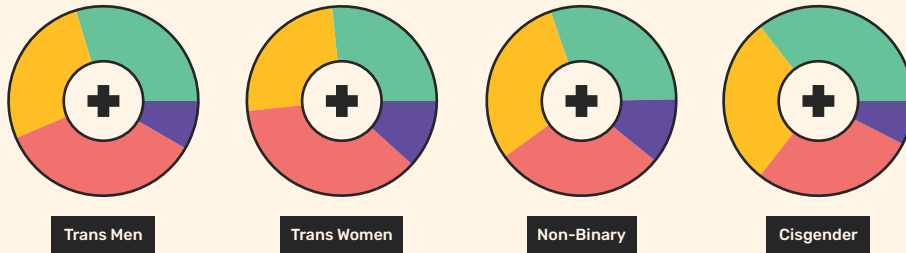
Number of Anxiety Symptoms Experienced Since the Onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic



Well-Being

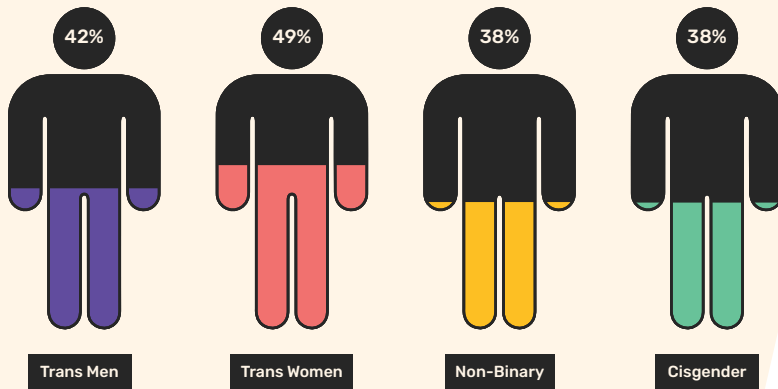
Do You Feel That Your Health + Well-Being Is Being Taken Into Consideration by Your Employer?

■ Not at All
■ Somewhat
■ For the Most Part
■ Definitely

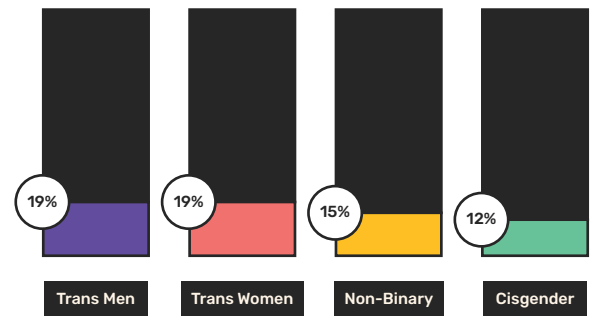


Trans + non-binary respondents were more likely to report being essential workers than cisgender respondents and were more likely to report feeling that their employer did not take their health into consideration.

Percent of People Who Are Essential Workers

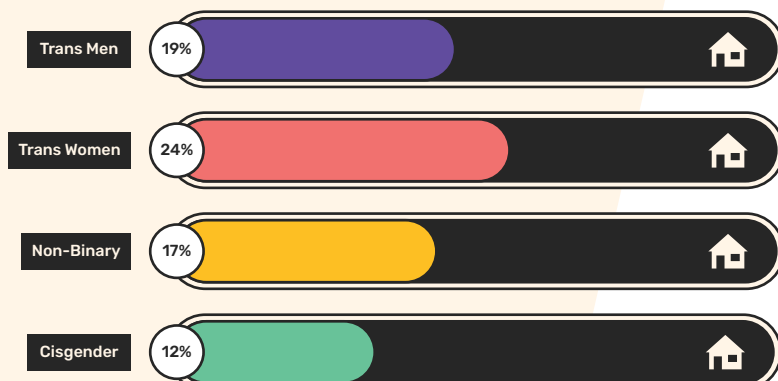


Percent of People Who Have Been Laid Off or Furloughed During the Coronavirus Pandemic

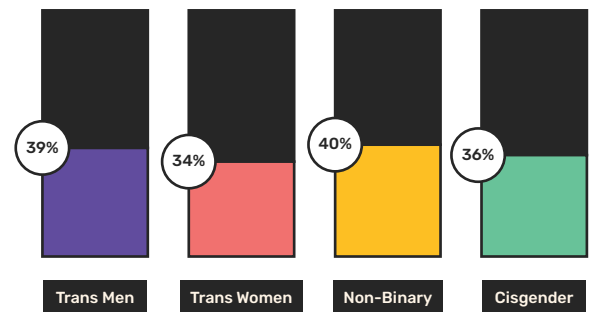


Trans + non-binary participants were more likely to report losing their job, experiencing a reduction in personal income, and being unable to pay for housing, groceries, and utilities than cisgender participants.

Percent of People Whose Change in Employment Has Changed Their Ability to Pay for Housing



Percent of People Whose Personal Income Decreased as a Result of the Pandemic



Impact on Physical Health

We asked respondents about how COVID-19 has impacted their physical health. In the following section, we report on respondents' access to healthcare; disruption of transition-related care; overall physical health; consumption of alcohol; and use of tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.

Self-Reported Physical Health

We asked respondents about changes to their overall physical health during the pandemic. [Across the board, participants experienced worse physical health outcomes due to the pandemic.](#) More than 50% of transgender men (55.48%), non-binary people (57.84%), and cisgender people (53.35%) reported their physical health as worsening during the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly half of transgender women (49.49%) similarly stated negative impacts on their overall physical health.

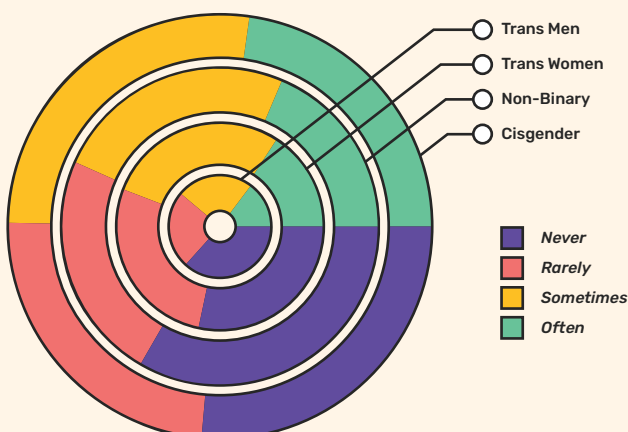
Access to Care

Fewer cisgender people's access to healthcare was affected by the coronavirus pandemic (11.07%) than transgender and non-binary people (19.67%) in the study. For example, 20.73% of transgender men said COVID-19 negatively affected their access to care, compared to 21.95% of transgender women, 19.08% of non-binary respondents, and 11.7% of cisgender respondents. More transgender and non-binary survey respondents reported having lost the ability to pay for medical care due to the pandemic (10.86%) than cisgender respondents (5.46%). [Transgender and non-binary respondents revealed that COVID-19 disrupted their access to transition-related care, with 20.08% of transgender people and 8.67% of non-binary people reporting an interruption.](#) When we asked about access to prescription medication, transgender respondents were more likely than the other groups to report an interference with their medication. For instance, more transgender respondents (17.12%) than cisgender respondents (8.84%) have had their access to medication impacted. Additionally, more transgender respondents (18.67%) than non-binary respondents (13.94%) had their access to medication impacted.

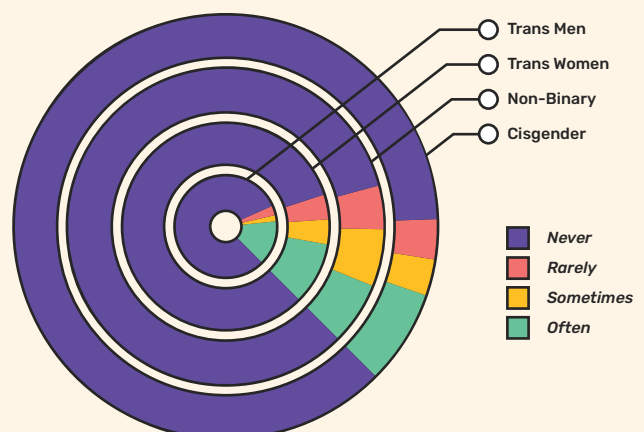
Alcohol + Substance Use

We asked respondents how often they consumed alcohol and how often they used cigarettes, marijuana, and other drugs over the 6 weeks prior to completing our survey. Our scale ranged from 1 to 4, where 1 indicated *Never*, 2 indicated *Rarely*, 3 indicated *Sometimes*, and 4 indicated *Often*. [Transgender and non-binary people, on average, consumed alcohol less and used tobacco products more often than cisgender people.](#) Both of these differences are statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$. In contrast, transgender and non-binary people used marijuana and other drugs on average more often than cisgender people. While drug use was slightly higher among transgender and non-binary respondents, well over the majority of transgender and non-binary individuals report never using marijuana (68.85%) or other drugs (90.38%).

Over the Past Six Weeks, How Often Have You Consumed Alcohol?



Over the Past Six Weeks, How Often Have You Smoked Cigarettes?



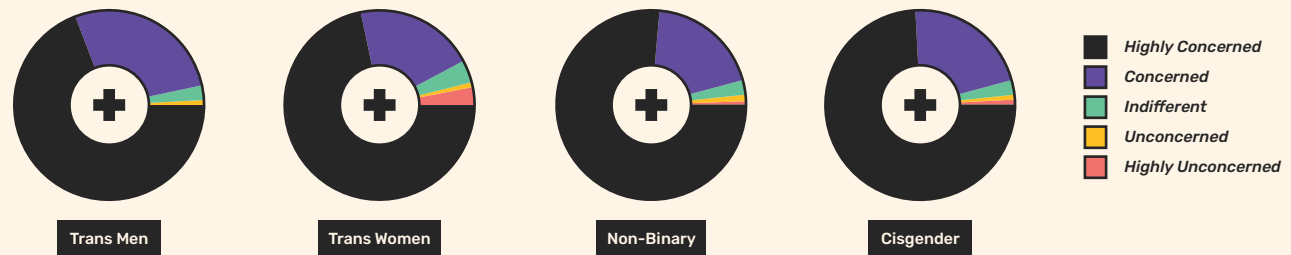
Impact on Mental Health

Similar to findings from a longitudinal study examining COVID-19's impact on transgender and non-binary people's mental health,⁹ our respondents reported worsening psychological stress in response to the pandemic.

Stress

We asked respondents their level of concern for their own health; their friends' and family members' health; and public health as it relates to COVID-19. While a majority of respondents stated they are concerned or highly concerned with how COVID-19 has impacted their health, transgender people reported higher average concern (4.04) than cisgender respondents (3.96). Findings reveal that 80.39% of transgender men, 78.64% of transgender women, 85.69% of non-binary people, and 82.22% of cisgender people reported feeling concerned or highly concerned about the pandemic's effect on their health. The majority of all respondents felt concerned about their friends' and family members' health as it relates to COVID-19. For instance, 96.71% of transgender men, 93.20% of transgender women, 96.16% of non-binary people, and 96.02% of cisgender people felt concerned or highly concerned about their friends' and family members' health. Almost all respondents, regardless of gender identity, reported high levels of concern about public health related to COVID-19: 96.73% of transgender men, 92.23% of transgender women, 95.84% of non-binary people, and 96.09% of cisgender people report being concerned or highly concerned about public health as it relates to COVID-19.

How Concerned Are You About Public Health as It Relates to COVID-19?



Social Support

More than half of all groups indicated that COVID-19 negatively impacted their social support. When asked about COVID-19's impact on their social support, 60.76% of transgender men, 51.96% of transgender women, 61.74% of non-binary people, and 57.42% of cisgender people reported having less access to social support.



Depression

Transgender and non-binary respondents scored higher on the depression scale (at 3.43 and 3.60 on a seven-point scale, respectively) compared to cisgender respondents (whose average score was 2.79). The difference in scores between trans men and women and non-binary people in our sample, the difference between these two groups taken together, and the difference between cisgender respondents were all statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$. Further analysis of the data reveals transgender men and non-binary people were more likely to report distressing depressive symptoms in comparison to the other groups. More than half of transgender men (54.41%) and non-binary people (58.61%), in addition to nearly half of transgender women (46.34%) and cisgender people (42.53%), stated they experienced between 4 to 6 depressive symptoms since the onset of the pandemic.



Anxiety

Trans men and women scored lower on the seven-point anxiety scale (3.509) than non-binary people (3.898). However, both transgender and non-binary respondents reported higher scores on the scale than cisgender respondents (3.271). Further, transgender men and non-binary respondents reported a similarly high number of anxiety symptoms since the onset of the pandemic. Nearly 40% of transgender men (36.79%) and non-binary people (37.98%) reported experiencing 6 anxiety symptoms whereas 29.27% of transgender women and 27.02% of cisgender respondents reported similar ratings.

⁹ Kidd, Jeremy D., Jackman, Kasey B., Barucco, R., Dworkin, Jordan D., Dolezal, C., Navalta, Theresa V., Belloir, J., and Bockting, Walter O., 2021. "Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of transgender and gender nonbinary individuals engaged in a longitudinal cohort study." *Journal of Homosexuality* 68, no. 4: 592-611.

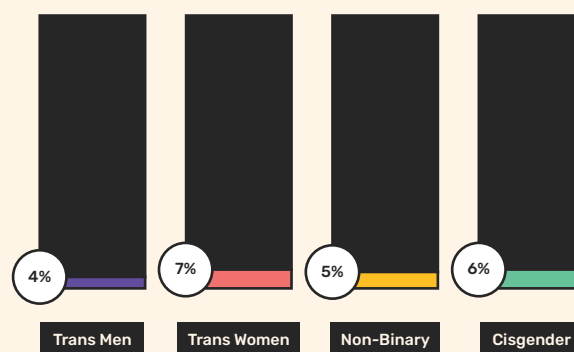
Impact on Well-Being

In this last section, we focus on COVID-19's impact on our respondents' well-being at work and home. Respondents reported on their employment as essential workers; relationships with employers; and experiences with decreased pay, job loss and furlough, and housing issues.

Changes in Employment

Essential workers face increased risk of contracting COVID-19.¹⁰ Because of this, we asked our respondents if they work in these high-risk occupations. **More transgender respondents (44.88%) than non-binary respondents (38.15%) reported being essential workers. Moreover, more transgender women (49.33%) reported being essential workers in comparison to transgender men (42.31%), non-binary people (38.15%), and cisgender people (37.82%).** A minority of respondents reported feeling that their health and well-being were not being taken into consideration by their employer. More transgender men (8.57%), transgender women (11.76%), and non-binary people (11.09%) felt that their employer did not take their consideration into account compared to cisgender people (7.52%). Our findings support the Kaiser Family Foundation's research on COVID-19's impact on the LGBTQ community's job loss. These researchers report that more than half of their LGBTQ respondents reported a job loss or furlough.¹¹ We additionally found within-group differences among participants. Comparing across gender identity, more transgender respondents (16.84%) were laid off than cisgender respondents (12.63%). Transgender men (18.65%), transgender women (18.70%), and non-binary people (14.85%) were more likely to experience job loss or be furloughed in comparison to cisgender people (12.42%).

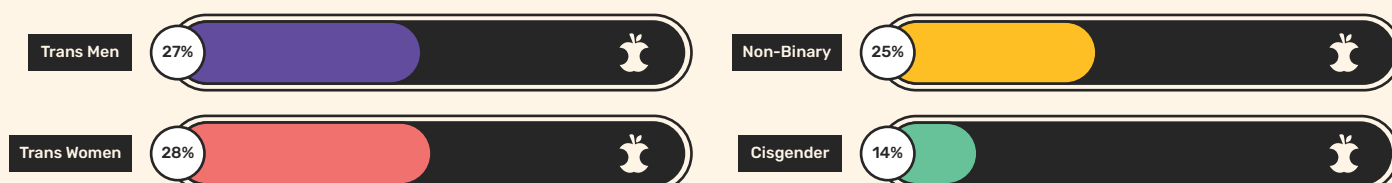
Percent of People Who Have Experienced Decreased Pay During the Coronavirus Pandemic



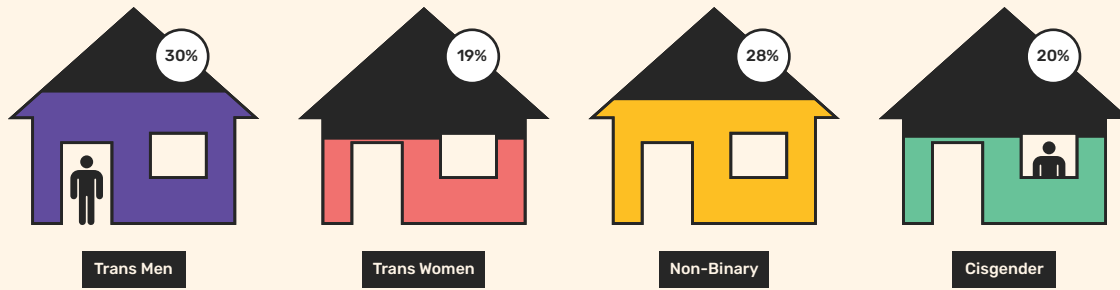
Changes in Resources for Basic Necessities

Just under 5% of all respondents report experiencing decreased pay during the coronavirus pandemic. **More transgender women report decreased pay at 6.50% compared to 5.26% of non-binary people, 3.63% of transgender men, and 5.96% of cisgender people.** Relatedly, 39.29% of transgender men, 33.96% of transgender women, 40.11% of non-binary people, and 36.22% of cisgender people report decreased personal income as a result of the pandemic. When asked about whether a change in employment for the respondent or someone in their household impacted their ability to pay for housing, groceries, and utilities, we see a similar theme for transgender and cisgender respondents. Across all categories, transgender people are more likely to report worse outcomes than cisgender people. **More transgender men (19.17%), transgender women (24.39%), and non-binary people (17.37%) than cisgender people (14.33%) report their employment changing their ability to pay for housing. COVID-19 has impacted the ability of more than one in four transgender respondents (26.59%) to pay for their groceries in comparison to 15.57% of cisgender respondents.** When we break these numbers down, we see that almost a third of transgender men (27.46%) and more than a quarter of transgender women (28.46%) had their ability to buy groceries impacted. Just under a quarter (24.61%) of non-binary respondents reported the same. Lastly, more transgender respondents (20.75%) than cisgender respondents (12.02%) had their ability to pay for utilities impacted.

Percent of People Whose Change in Employment Has Changed Their Ability to Buy Groceries



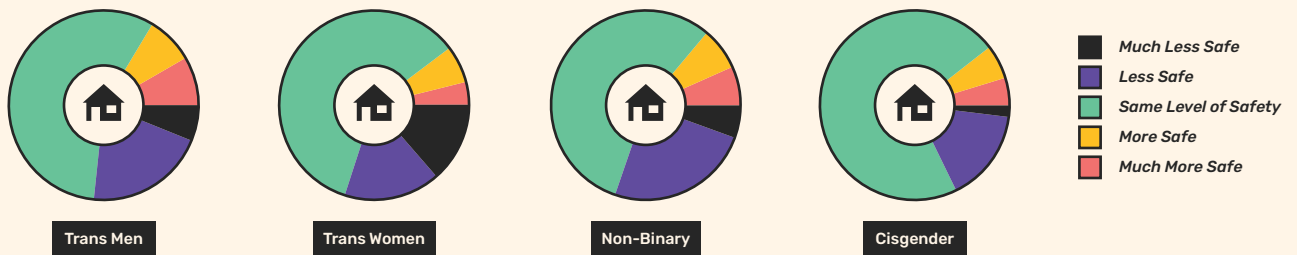
Percent of People Whose Housing Situation Changed as a Result of the Coronavirus Pandemic



Changes in Living Conditions

More transgender people (27.08%) had their housing situation change than cisgender people (21.03%). Transgender men (30.26%) and non-binary people (28.24%) were more likely to report changes in their housing situations as a result of the pandemic in comparison to 19.23% of transgender women and 19.67% of cisgender people. Further, more transgender men (30.26%) had their housing situation change than transgender women (19.23%). The percentage of respondents who feel less safe in their current housing situation after coronavirus than before varies across gender identity. *On average, transgender people feel less safe in current housing than cisgender people. Transgender women on average felt less safe in current housing than transgender men. Breaking this down further, transgender men (26.87%), transgender women (30.18%), and non-binary people (30.33%) reported feeling less safe or much less safe in comparison to cisgender people (17.98%).* These findings are consistent with the Williams Institute's report on Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 Among Transgender Adults in the U.S. Based on their reporting on the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, transgender adults may experience increased risk of intimate partner violence and isolation from family members.¹²

Do You Feel More or Less Safe in Your Current Housing Situation Than You Did Before Coronavirus?



¹⁰ Selden, T.M., and Berdahl, T.A., 2021. Risk of Severe COVID-19 Among Workers and Their Household Members. JAMA Intern Med.; 181(1):120–122.

¹¹ Dawson, L., Kirzinger, A., and Kates, J., 2021. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBT people. San Francisco, CA: The Kaiser Family Foundation.

¹² Herman, Jody L., and O'Neill, K., 2020. "Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 among transgender adults in the US."

Putting Our Study in Context

Compounding Stressors in Times of Crisis

Over the course of the pandemic, social and economic inequities have become more pronounced for already marginalized groups.¹³ These inequities lead to food and housing insecurity, unemployment or loss of wages, and the inability to access other necessary services among trans people.

In pre-pandemic times, transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse people have been more likely to report chronic mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, than their cisgender and gender conforming peers.¹⁴ These disparities have been linked to trans people's experiences of minority stress, or the stigma and discrimination that is targeted at transgender people.¹⁵

In times of crisis, trans people who live with chronic mental health conditions may find that their conditions are exacerbated by the increase of situational stressors and the interruption of access to traditional and community support services.¹⁶

Community and Resilience in Times of Social Distancing

Community involvement, peer interaction, and social support are key mechanisms for protecting trans people from the negative effects of stigma and discrimination that result in elevated rates of anxiety and depression in everyday lives.¹⁷

Over the course of the pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing mandates have made it more difficult for transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse people to engage with community and access peer and social support.¹⁸

Trans people rely on community connection and peer support to offset the negative mental health effects of stigma and discrimination. In times when social isolation is necessary and face-to-face interaction is limited, stakeholders should direct resources to developing and maintaining social connections across physical distances.

Living with HIV During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Black transgender women in the US Southeast are disproportionately affected by and living with HIV.¹⁹

The intersection of gender identity and HIV status contributes to this population being mistreated by providers and receiving substandard care from providers who are uncomfortable with or uneducated about transgender health.²⁰

Over the course of the pandemic, HIV care has been disrupted for trans people. As resources have been consolidated and mobilized to address COVID-19, trans people living with HIV have reported lack of access to providers and prescriptions.²¹

Southern trans women who are living with HIV are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. This group should be centered in all efforts to support transgender communities through this public health crisis and the next.

¹³ Perry, B.L., Aronson, B., Pescosolido, B.A., 2021. Pandemic precarity: COVID-19 is exposing and exacerbating inequalities in the American heartland. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 118 (8) e2020685118

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