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Key Highlights

- A series of surveys conducted between July 2021 – May 2022 (1-2 years into the COVID-19 pandemic) revealed that almost one in three households (29%) with children under age 5 experienced child care disruptions in the four weeks preceding the surveys.
- Higher rates of child care disruptions were observed in households with the following characteristics:
 - A survey respondent who identified as Black or who was categorized as another race/multiple races (compared to non-Hispanic White)
 - Only one adult (compared to two adults or three or more adults)
 - Incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (compared to 200% FPL or above)
 - A survey respondent who did not work in the past seven days (compared to those who worked)
 - At least one adult who teleworked (compared to those with no adults teleworking)
- Many households with children under age 5 had to make employment-related adjustments in response to child care disruptions. Among households that experienced child care disruptions, 47 percent lost pay, 32 percent took paid leave, 28 percent supervised children while working, and 30 percent did not work or did not search for a job.
- Higher rates of taking paid leave and/or supervising children while working in response to child care disruptions were observed in households with the following characteristics:
 - A survey respondent who identified as White
 - Two adults
 - Higher incomes (200% FPL or above)
 - A survey respondent who was employed
 - At least one adult who teleworked
- Higher rates of not working and/or not searching for a job in response to child care disruptions were observed in households with the following characteristics:
 - A survey respondent who identified as Hispanic, Black, or another race/multiple races
 - Lower incomes (below 200% FPL)
 - A survey respondent who was not employed
 - No adults who teleworked

Introduction

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States (and globally), children and their families began experiencing severe disruptions to schooling and child care. By the end of March 2020, all but one U.S. public school district was closed in response to COVID-19,¹ and at the start of the 2020-21 school year 74 percent of the largest school districts remained closed for in-person instruction.² While more likely to stay open compared to K-12 schools, about two thirds of child care centers were closed in April 2020 and one third remained closed in April 2021.³ In addition to being disruptive to children's learning⁴ and well-being,⁵ these closures disrupted many parents' abilities to work, with many parents (disproportionally mothers) reducing work hours or leaving the workforce altogether in order to care for children.⁶

In 2021, many child care settings re-opened⁷ as in-person learning became safer due to improved knowledge of how to keep children and staff healthy amidst the pandemic (e.g., improved cleaning procedures, keeping children in smaller than typical groups) and increased availability and administration of vaccines for adults. Despite re-openings, however, child care (and thus employment) disruptions continued due to ongoing illnesses among staff and children, staff needing to care for their sick family members, and workforce shortages.^{8,9} Importantly, child care and employment disruptions were not felt equally among all children and families. Prior studies among families and households with children under age 18 have found that Black and Latino^a households and families experienced significantly higher rates of child care disruptions compared to White families, and households with lower incomes experienced higher rates of disruptions than those with higher incomes.¹⁰⁻¹² Higher rates of child care disruptions within these groups are an equity concern because pandemic-related care disruptions have been linked with elevated emotional distress and anxiety and decreased well-being for parents.¹³⁻¹⁶

On average, Black and Hispanic individuals, as well as those with lower incomes, had fewer resources with which to respond to sudden and prolonged child care disruptions than others due to the nature of their employment. More specifically, due to historical inequities in who could access higher education,^{17,18} buy homes in desirable neighborhoods,¹⁹ and build wealth,²⁰ Black and Hispanic workers and workers with lower incomes are less likely to work in jobs with flexibility to shift hours, have ample paid time off, and have the ability to telework compared to White individuals and those with higher incomes.²¹⁻²³ Indeed, likely related to these pre-existing differences in employment features, Black and Hispanic households with children under 18, as well as those with lower incomes, were more likely to report losing a job or taking unpaid leave. They were also less likely to report taking paid time off in response to child care disruptions in the Spring of 2021 compared to White and Asian households, and households with higher incomes.²⁴⁻²⁸

In this report, we describe rates of child care disruptions and employment-related responses to those disruptions (i.e., losing pay, taking paid leave, not working or not searching for a job, supervising children while working) from July 2021 to May 2022 for households with children under age 5, both overall and by five household characteristics. Those characteristics include race/ethnicity, household income, the number of adults in the household, employment status, and telework status. This report adds to our understanding of child care disruptions and households' employment-related responses to disruptions in two important ways:

- **Focus on households with children under age 5.** While all households with children were prone to disruptions in child care caused by the pandemic, households with children under age 5 were particularly vulnerable for several reasons. First, children under age 5 require more supervision from caregivers than older children, who on average may be able to participate in remote learning or other activities with less adult intervention. Second, more adults are required to care for younger than older children in child care facilities,²⁹ which means that staff shortages in child care settings were likely to be more disruptive for younger children (compared to older children). Third, parents with young children are more likely to live in poverty compared to parents of older children, who have fewer child care expenses and are often further along in their careers.³⁰ Finally, vaccines for children ages 6 months to 5 years were not available until June 2022, eight months later than vaccines for children ages 5 through 11³¹—thus, households with children under age 5 may have experienced ongoing disruptions for a longer duration. Indeed, the only study to compare national estimates of child care disruptions by age of children in the household found that disruptions were more prevalent among households with children from birth to age 5 (38.6%) than households with children ages 13 to 17 in 2020 (7.5%).³² It is important to understand patterns of disruptions for households with younger children specifically, as this group was particularly vulnerable to disruptions but has not been the focus of prior research.
- **Examine additional household characteristics.** While differences in child care disruptions and responses to disruptions by race/ethnicity and income have been documented for households

^a We use the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably throughout. Latino respondents may be of any race. We use the terms “White,” “Black,” and “Asian” to refer to non-Hispanic individuals.

with any children, national estimates broken down by these characteristics have not been reported separately for households with any children under age 5. Moreover, it is largely unknown whether child care disruptions and responses to disruptions differ by other important household characteristics, like the number of adults in the household and household members' employment and telework statuses. In general, we would expect to see greater disruptions and harsher employment-related consequences for groups for whom barriers to taking paid leave, teleworking, or finding alternative care during disruptions are the greatest. For instance, households that have more than one adult living in the household might be able to rely on (or prefer) other family members to provide child care during the pandemic rather than using a more formal child care arrangement, and so might have experienced fewer child care disruptions compared to households with fewer adults in the household. Respondents who were employed may have had a greater need for child care, have needed care for longer hours, and potentially have needed a greater number of child care arrangements than respondents who were not employed. Each of these conditions could increase the likelihood of experiencing child care disruptions. Parents who telework or have household members teleworking might also take turns caring for their children³⁴ to avoid child care disruptions, and those who could not telework may have experienced greater disruptions. These characteristics are also likely to be associated with how households respond to child care disruptions (e.g., whether they have the flexibility to supervise children while working). Understanding whether and how child care disruptions and responses to disruptions differ across groups can help us gain a more nuanced understanding of the different ways that child care disruptions have been experienced by households with young children during the pandemic.

Overall, findings from this report add to the literature on child care disruptions during the pandemic, and provide new insights into disruptions and how those disruptions affect families with our youngest learners.

Research questions

1. Did the percentage of households with children under age 5 experiencing child care disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic differ by household characteristics?
2. Among those households with children under age 5 that experienced child care disruptions, did the employment-related responses to child care disruptions vary by household characteristics?

The household characteristics examined in this brief include:

- Race/ethnicity
- Income
- Number of adults in the household
- Employment status
- Telework status

Methodology and Data

The U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey (HPS) is a nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional survey of U.S. households that aims to provide information on how the coronavirus pandemic has affected households from both social and economic perspectives.³⁵ Initial data collection for the HPS began in April 2020. Some specific survey questions have changed over time, but topics generally include mental health, child care, education, employment, food security, health, housing, and household spending. Data are collected over two-week time periods, and these two-week periods fall into different data collection “Phases.” During each two-week time period, a new sample of households is surveyed. Data collection time periods can be pooled to examine national (and state) trends over the course of the pandemic.

We used pooled data from Phases 3.2 (July 21 – October 11, 2021), 3.3 (December 1, 2021 – February 7, 2022), and 3.4 (March 2 – May 9, 2022)^b of the HPS to address our research questions. In these phases of the survey, the HPS includes both questions about child care disruptions and indicators for whether there were children in the household under age 5, ages 5 through 11, and ages 12 through 17.

We applied the appropriate survey weights (provided by the Census Bureau) to all analyses; estimates from each phase of the survey can thus be considered nationally representative. Our analytic sample based on pooled data from the three waves includes all households with any children under age 5 (including those that also had older children) who had non-missing data on the HPS survey question about child care disruptions (see below; unweighted n = 34,537; weighted n = 75,359,478).

Measures

Child care disruptions: Whether any children in the household experienced child care disruptions in the last 4 weeks as a result of child care being closed, unavailable, unaffordable, or due to safety concerns. Respondents with any children under age 12 in the household were asked about child care disruptions with the following question: “At any time in the last 4 weeks, were any children in the household unable to attend daycare or another child care arrangement as a result of child care being closed, unavailable, unaffordable, or because you are concerned about your child’s safety in care? Please include before school care, after school care, and all other forms of childcare that were unavailable. Select only one answer.” Respondents could select “Yes,” “No,” or “Not applicable.”^c

Responses to disruptions: Employment-related responses to child care disruptions among households that reported experiencing disruptions, grouped into four categories: adult in the household lost pay (i.e., took unpaid leave or cut hours), adult in the household took paid leave, adult in the household did not work or did not search for work (i.e., left a job, lost a job, and/or did not look for a job), and adult in household supervised child(ren) while working.^d

Race/ethnicity: The survey respondents’ race/ethnicity, grouped into five categories: Hispanic, any race; non-Hispanic Asian; non-Hispanic Black; non-Hispanic White; and another non-Hispanic race or multiple races. We use the terms “Asian,” “Black,” and “White,” to refer to non-Hispanic individuals.

Household income: The household’s income before taxes in 2020, as a percentage of the federal poverty level (FPL), grouped into three categories: below 200 percent of the FPL; between 200 percent and 399 percent of the FPL; and 400 percent of the FPL and above.

Number of adults in the household: The number of adults in the household, grouped into three categories: one adult, two adults, and three or more adults.

Employment status: Whether the respondent worked in the past seven days: yes or no.

Telework status: Whether anyone in the household teleworked in the past seven days: yes or no.

^b These three Phases correspond to 12 two-week time periods during which new samples of households were surveyed.

^c Survey respondents were always able to select the “Not applicable” category if the question about child care disruptions did not apply to them. However, from July 21, 2021 – March 14, 2022, when the Census Bureau exported the data, the “Not applicable” responses were coded as missing (i.e., “Question seen but category not selected” (-99) category) rather than as a separate “Not applicable” category. From March 30, 2022 – May 9, 2022, the “Not applicable” responses were appropriately exported as a distinct category. Our analytic sample includes only households who answered “Yes” or “No.” We infer that this sample consists only of households that relied on child care at the time of the survey because we assume that respondents without a child care arrangement would have selected “Not applicable.” Rates of child care disruptions were calculated as those who responded “Yes” divided by those who responded “Yes” or “No.”

^d Those who indicated that their household had experienced any child care disruptions were asked whether, in the last four weeks as a result of child care being closed or unavailable, any adult in the household, including themselves, (1) took unpaid leave; (2) used vacation, sick days, or other paid leave; (3) cut hours; (4) left a job; (5) lost a job; (6) did not look for a job; (7) supervised one or more children while working; (8) other; or (9) none of the above. Respondents were able to select all responses that applied. Rates of disruption responses were calculated as the number of respondents who selected a given disruption response divided by the total number of respondents who experienced child care disruptions.

Analytic Strategy

To answer our research questions, we estimated weighted rates of child care disruptions (RQ1) and responses to disruptions (RQ2) for each household characteristic subgroup examined (e.g., each racial/ethnic group). We conducted chi-square analyses to determine if there were any significant differences in weighted rates of child care disruptions or responses to disruptions for each household characteristic. For characteristics where chi-square analyses showed that there were significant differences between groups, we conducted post-hoc tests for differences in proportions to determine which specific categories were significantly different from the reference category. Respondents with missing data on child care disruptions were excluded from all analyses. Respondents with valid data on child care disruptions but missing data on any of the subgroup variables were excluded from those individual subgroup analyses. We used the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure to adjust for multiple comparisons.

A note on race/ethnicity

To examine the rates of child care disruptions as well as responses to disruptions by household characteristics, we chose a reference group for each household characteristic. For race/ethnicity, we carefully considered this choice. It is common to use non-Hispanic White as the reference group in data analysis, but this practice tends to center the experiences of White children and families and their experiences as “normal” or “typical.”^e A few alternatives were considered: conducting all pairwise comparisons, comparing all groups to the average, or using a different race/ethnicity group as the reference group.

We chose not to conduct all pairwise comparisons in order to avoid having to test a large number of comparisons, which would necessitate stricter corrections for multiple comparisons and could be difficult to interpret. We also chose not to compare all groups to the average rate of child care disruptions because averages are inherently heavily impacted by who is in the sample (i.e., if 50% of the sample is non-Hispanic White, the average will look closer to that group than it would for a sample with a different racial/ethnic composition) and there is no benchmark national average of child care disruptions to which we could compare subgroups. Relatedly, comparing groups to the sample average could mask important differences in subgroups’ experiences of disruptions—two groups might not significantly differ from the average rate of child care disruptions, but could experience vastly different rates than one another.

This left us with choosing one reference group for comparisons. We chose the non-Hispanic White group as the reference group because this group tended to have either the highest or lowest rate of child care disruptions and the lowest or highest rate of specific responses to disruptions, making for more easily interpretable comparisons. However, we should not take this to mean that the non-Hispanic White experience is the ideal standard to which other groups should be compared. All child care disruptions are by definition disruptive for all families, and supports for avoiding them (and their employment-related responses) should aim to support all families.

^e Thomson, D., Ryberg, R., Harper, K., Fuller, J., Paschall, K., Franklin, J., & Guzman, L. (2022). *Lessons from a historic decline in child poverty*. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/lessons-from-a-historic-decline-in-child-poverty>

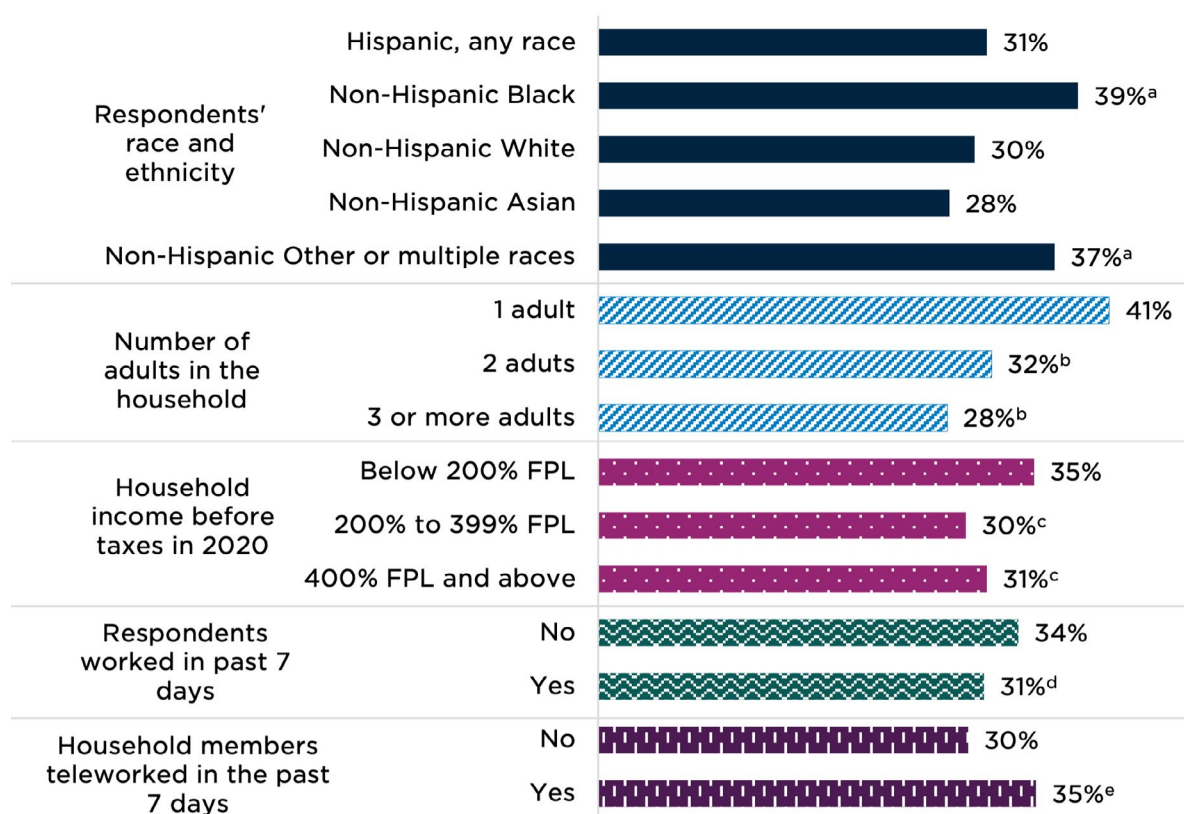
Findings

Child care disruptions varied by household characteristics

Did the percentage of households with children under age 5 experiencing child care disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic differ by household characteristics?

Overall, 29 percent of households with children under age 5 experienced child care disruptions in the four weeks preceding the survey. Child care disruption rates tended to be higher among households with a respondent identifying as Black or another race/multiple races compared to those who identified as White (see Figure 1). Child care disruption rates were also higher, on average, among households with incomes below 200 percent FPL and those with only one adult, compared to households with higher incomes and those with two or more adults. In addition, higher child care disruptions were associated with households that had a respondent who did not work in the past seven days and those that had no household members (including the respondent) teleworking in the past seven days.

Figure 1. Proportions of households with children under age five experiencing child care disruptions in the four weeks preceding the surveys (pooled data from July 2021-May 2022)



Note:

^a Indicates a significant difference from Non-Hispanic White.

^b Indicates a significant difference from a one-adult household.

^c Indicates a significant difference from below 200% FPL.

^d Indicates a significant difference from respondents who worked in the past seven days.

^e Indicates a significant difference from respondents who had someone in the household telework in the past seven days.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey Phases 3.2-3.4 (July 11, 2021 – May 9, 2022)

Employment-related responses to child care disruptions also varied by household characteristics

Among those households with children under age 5 that experienced child care disruptions, did the employment-related responses to child care disruptions vary by household characteristics?

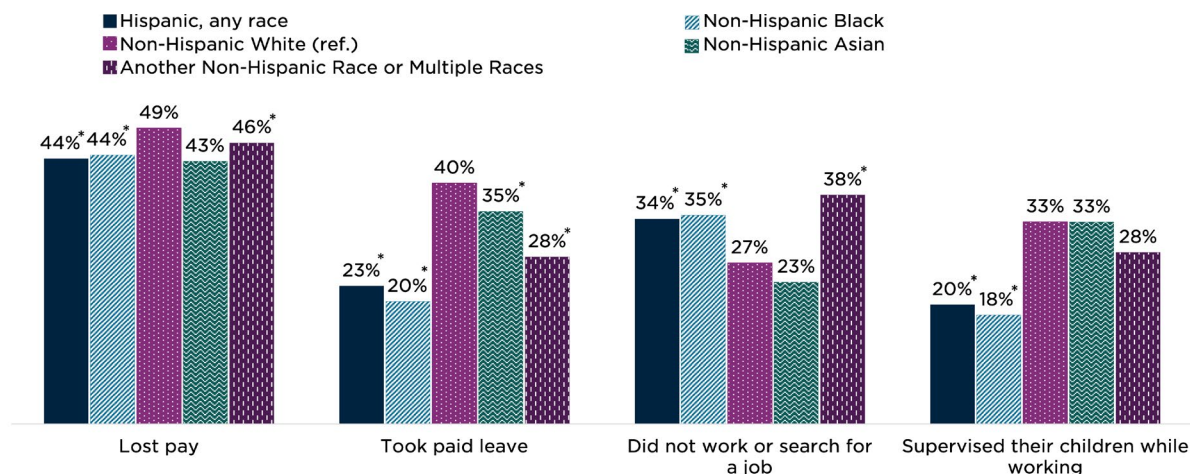
Households with children under age 5 that experienced child care disruptions reported whether they experienced any employment-related changes in response to their child care disruptions, including losing pay, taking paid leave, not working or not searching for a job, or supervising children while working. Among households that experienced child care disruptions, 47 percent lost pay, 32 percent took paid leave, 28 percent supervised children while working, and 30 percent did not work or did not search for a job.

Employment-related responses to child care disruptions varied by household characteristics. Specifically, respondents’ race and ethnicity, respondents’ employment status, and household members’ telework status were associated with all employment-related responses. In addition, household income was associated with all employment-related responses except for losing pay. Figures 2-6 show employment-related responses among households with children under age 5 that experienced child care disruptions, by household characteristics. We describe the results in more detail below.

Asian, Black, and Hispanic households that experienced disruptions were less likely to lose pay, take paid leave, or supervise children while working, but more likely to not work or not search for a job compared to White households

Among households that experienced child care disruptions, employment-related responses varied by race and ethnicity. In general, households with Black and Hispanic respondents were less likely to report losing pay (44% and 44%), taking paid leave (20% and 23%), or supervising children while working (18% and 20%) compared to households with White respondents (49% lost pay, 40% took paid leave, and 33% supervised children while working). Households with Black and Hispanic respondents were also more likely to report not working or not searching for a job (35% and 34%) compared to households with White respondents (27%). Additionally, compared to households with White respondents, households with Asian respondents were less likely to report taking paid leave (35%), or supervising children while working (33%); households with respondents of another or multiple races were also less likely to report taking paid leave (28%) but more likely to report not working or not searching for a job (38%; Figure 2).

Figure 2. Rates of employment-related responses among those who reported child care disruptions from July 2021-May 2022, by respondent race/ethnicity



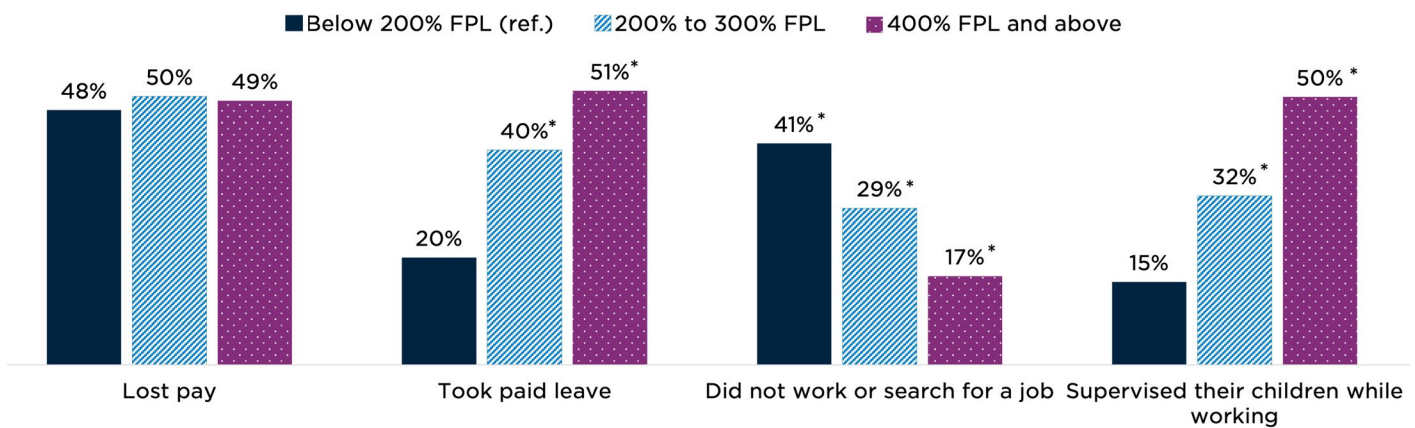
*Indicates a significant difference (p<0.05) from the reference category (ref.)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey Phases 3.2-3.4 (July 11, 2021 – May 9, 2022)

Households with incomes below 200% FPL were less likely to take paid leave or supervise children while working, but more likely to not work or not search for a job, in response to child care disruptions

Households' responses to child care disruptions varied by their incomes. A smaller proportion of households with incomes below 200 percent FPL took paid leave (20%) or supervised their children while working (15%) compared to households with incomes at 200-300 percent of the FPL and at 400 percent of the FPL and above (40% and 51%, 32% and 50%, respectively). By contrast, households with incomes below 200 percent FPL were more likely to report not working or not searching for a job (41%) in response to child care disruptions, compared to households with incomes at 200-300 percent of the FPL and at 400 percent of the FPL and above (29% and 17%). Households with lower incomes were as likely to lose pay as households with higher incomes; about 50% of households lost pay, regardless of their household income category (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Rates of employment-related responses among those who reported child care disruptions from July 2021-May 2022, by household income (as a percentage of the FPL)



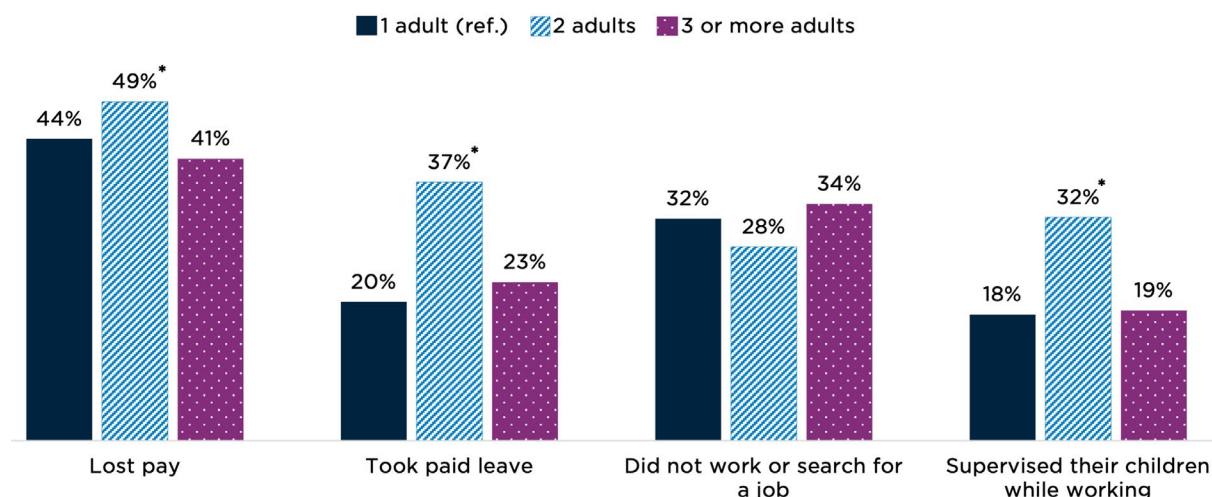
*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from the reference category (ref.)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey Phases 3.2-3.4 (July 11, 2021 – May 9, 2022)

Households with one adult were less likely to lose pay, take paid leave, or supervise children while working than households with two adults

Having two adults in the household was associated with higher rates of losing pay (49%), taking paid leave (37%), and supervising children while working (32%), compared to households with one adult (44%, 20%, 18% respectively). There were no significant differences in employment-related responses for households with three or more adults versus one adult. There were also no significant differences in rates of not working or not searching for a job by the number of adults in the household (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Rates of employment-related responses among those who reported child care disruptions from July 2021-May 2022, by number of adults in the household.



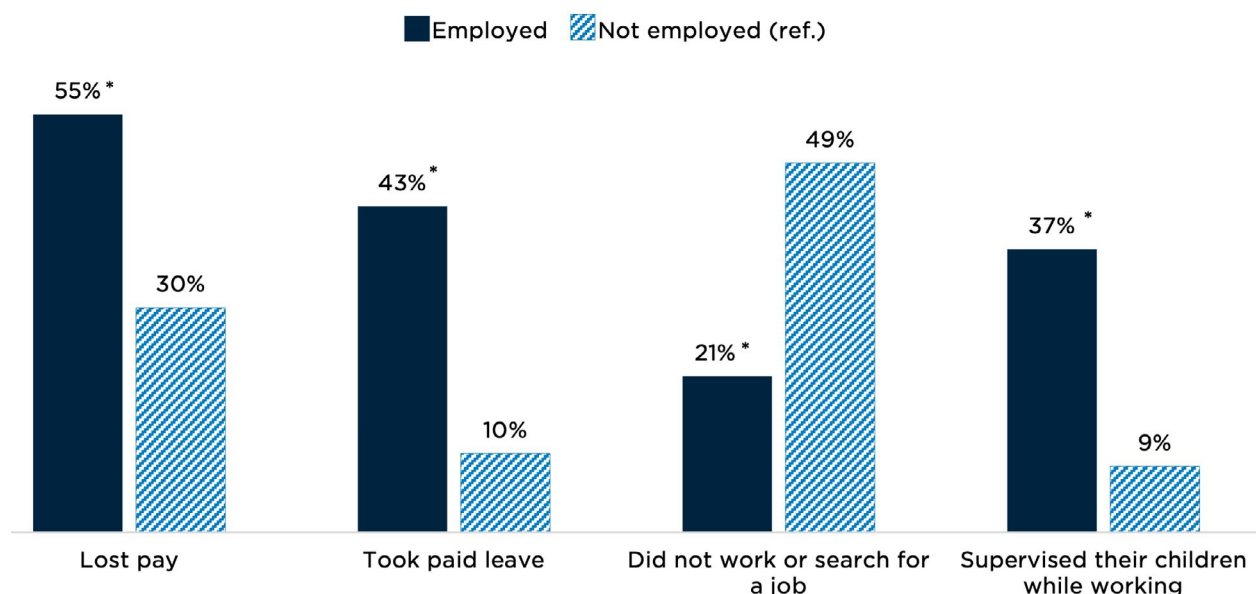
*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from the reference category (ref.)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey Phases 3.2-3.4 (July 11, 2021 – May 9, 2022)

Respondents who worked were more likely to lose pay, take paid leave, and supervise children while working when their households experienced child care disruptions

Households having respondents who worked in the past seven days was associated with higher rates of losing pay (55%), taking paid leave (43%), and supervising their children while working (37%) in response to child care disruptions compared to respondents who did not work (30%, 10%, 9%, respectively). By contrast, respondents who worked were less likely to report not working or not searching for a job (21%) compared to respondents who did not work (49%; Figure 5).

Figure 5. Rates of employment-related responses among respondents who reported child care disruptions from July 2021-May 2022, by employment status



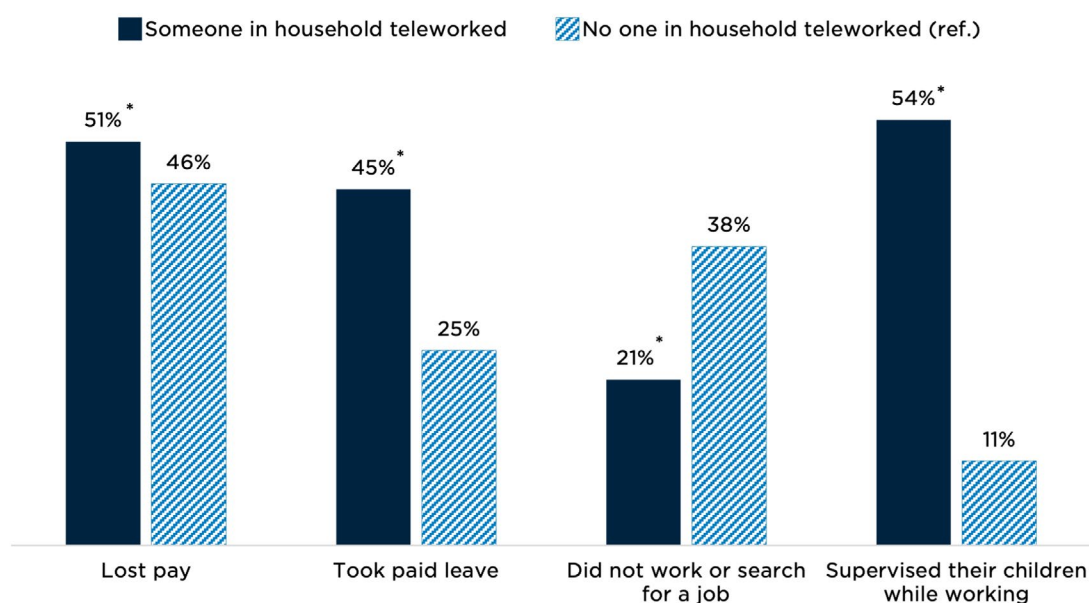
*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from the reference category (ref.)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey Phases 3.2-3.4 (July 11, 2021 – May 9, 2022)

Households with members teleworking had higher rates of losing pay, taking paid leave, and supervising children while working; and had lower rates of not working or searching for a job

Among households experiencing child care disruptions, those with any member teleworking in the past seven days were more likely to report losing pay (51%), taking paid leave (45%), and supervising children while working (54%) compared with those without household members teleworking (46%, 25%, and 11% respectively). By comparison, households with members who teleworked reported lower rates of not working or searching for a job (21%) compared to households with members who did not telework (38%; Figure 6).^f

Figure 6. Rates of employment-related responses among respondents who reported child care disruptions from July 2021-May 2022, by telework status



*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from the reference category (ref.)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey Phases 3.2-3.4 (July 11, 2021 – May 9, 2022)

Summary and Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic was a time of great disruption to daily lives. At the onset of the pandemic in the United States, most child care facilities closed, posing major challenges for households with young children. Even as child care programs began to reopen, parents and children continued to face pandemic-related disruptions, which in many cases also required parents to make adjustments to their usual employment arrangements. The present study sought to describe rates of child care disruptions among U.S. households with children under age 5 from July 2021 to May 2022 by five key household characteristics, as well as rates of employment-related responses to child care disruptions for those same groups.

Through a series of surveys conducted more than one year into the pandemic, we found that **almost one in three households (29%) with children under 5 experienced child care disruptions in the past four weeks**. Households tended to report higher rates of child care disruptions when:

^f Some respondents also reported other employment responses not described above when their households experienced child care disruptions. Characteristics associated with higher rates of other employment responses included households that had a respondent who identified as Hispanic or non-Hispanic Black, had incomes below 200% FPL, had 1 adult or 3 or more adults, had a respondent who did not work in the past seven days, and had household members not teleworking.

- **The survey respondent identified as Black or as another/multiple races** (compared to non-Hispanic White respondents)
- **The household had only one adult** (compared to two or three or more adults)
- **The household had an income below 200% of the FPL** (compared to 200% FPL or above)
- **The survey respondent did not work in the past seven days** (compared to those who did)
- **The household included members who teleworked** (compared to if it did not)

With regard to employment-related responses to child care disruptions, **households with White respondents, households with two adults, households with higher incomes, households with respondents who were employed, and households that had members who teleworked experienced higher rates of taking paid leave or supervising children while working.** It is noteworthy that households with these characteristics tend to be at an advantage in terms of accessing resources³⁶⁻³⁹ and also tended to make the less costly employment adjustments in response to child care disruptions. By contrast, **households with respondents who identified as Hispanic, Black, or another race/multiple races, households with lower incomes, households with respondents who were not employed, and households with members who did not telework experienced higher rates of not working or not searching for a job in response to child care disruptions.** Households with these characteristics tend to be at less of an advantage when it comes to accessing resources⁴⁰⁻⁴³ and also tended to have the more costly employment responses to child care disruptions.

Findings indicate that child care disruptions and employment-related responses varied by race/ethnicity and income. These results mirror those from prior work⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶ though rates of child care disruptions were higher in our sample of households with children under age 5 than rates that have been reported for households with older children. This points to unique vulnerabilities in child care stability during the pandemic for households with younger children. Findings are also in line with substantial prior research showing that Black, Latino, and groups with lower incomes were more susceptible to pandemic-related hardships across multiple domains.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹ Indeed, these groups were, on average, already more vulnerable than others to a public health crisis due to being more likely to have jobs that had lower pay, included fewer benefits, and were less flexible—conditions resulting from structural barriers to education and employment for people of color.⁵⁰⁻⁵² These groups then experienced greater pandemic-related hardships on average (e.g., illness, death, financial strain).⁵³⁻⁵⁷ Experiencing greater rates of child care disruptions (for Black households and households with lower incomes) and then having to make more costly work adjustments in response to those disruptions by losing pay or not working or not searching for a job (for Black and Hispanic households and households with lower incomes) may have contributed to these hardships during the pandemic. The present study also shows that disproportionate hardships related to child care disruptions for Black and Hispanic households and households with lower incomes persisted 1-2 years into the pandemic.

Interestingly, among households with children under age 5, households with Hispanic respondents experienced similar rates of child care disruptions as households with White respondents 1-2 years into the pandemic. However, households with Hispanic respondents still experienced more costly employment-related responses to child care disruptions compared to households with White respondents. Similar rates of child care disruptions among these two groups stand in contrast to findings from other studies using the HPS among households with older children,^{58,59} but are in line with a study that found similar rates of child care disruptions among households with children under age 5 specifically. The latter study found that differences in rates of child care disruptions between households with White and Hispanic respondents were present for households with older children but were diminished for those with children under 5. This signals that differences in child care disruptions between White and Hispanic respondents may depend on the age of children included. Despite similar rates of child care disruptions for White and Hispanic groups among households with children under five, households with Hispanic respondents were still less likely to take paid leave or supervise children while working and were more likely to not work or not search for a job compared to households with White respondents. These findings may point to differences in workplace options and circumstances among these groups, including access to paid leave and flexible schedules.^{61,62}

Child care disruptions and employment-related responses varied by number of adults in the household. The findings for number of adults in the household were somewhat nuanced. **Households with one adult were more likely to experience child care disruptions** than households with two or three or more adults. This might be because households with one adult were likely to rely on more formal care arrangements such as centers or family child care homes that were subject to closures. By comparison, households with two or more adults might have more access to care provided by other family members and therefore may not have been as affected by program closures. **Households with one adult were also less likely to take paid leave or supervise children while working compared to households with two adults.** One possibility for this finding is that households with one adult may have had less overall paid leave to use compared to households with two adults, and with only one adult in the household it may not have been feasible to supervise young children alone while also working.

Households with one adult were also less likely to report losing pay than those with two adults—perhaps because households with two adults were better able to withstand losing income and were therefore more likely to have one adult reduce work hours in response to child care disruptions. By comparison, households with one adult may have had to make alternative child care arrangements in the face of disruptions. Importantly, while rates of losing pay were lower for households with one adult compared to two, they were still relatively high for both groups. Forty-four percent and 49 percent of households with one and two adults, respectively, reported losing pay in response to child care disruptions, meaning that many families with children under age 5 lost pay in response to child care disruptions.

Interestingly, while households with one adult experienced greater rates of child care disruptions than households with three or more adults, **rates of various employment-related responses to disruptions were similar for households with one adult and households with three or more adults.** One possibility is that having three or more adults in households with children under five in many cases signals increased—rather than decreased—caretaking responsibilities for the other adults in the household (e.g., there may be grandparents in the household that need care from the parents of young children) such that the employment responses for these households look more



similar to households with one adult than those with two adults.⁶³ Further, as older adults are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or getting very sick from the disease, caregiving responsibilities for older adults might have increased for parents of young children during the pandemic. Another possibility is that other characteristics that overlap with living in multigenerational households—such as being Black or Hispanic⁶⁴—drove the associations between households with three or more adults and employment-related responses (i.e., relatively lower rates of both taking paid leave and supervising children while working). More research is needed to further understand these patterns.

Patterns in employment responses to child care disruptions were similar for employment and telework status. Households with respondents who were employed and households that had members who teleworked had higher rates of losing pay, taking paid leave, and supervising children while working compared to those who were not employed or who did not telework, respectively. Those who were employed or who teleworked also had lower rates of not working or not searching for a job compared to those who were not employed or who teleworked, respectively. These similar patterns make sense given that only those who are employed can telework. Differences in rates of employment responses tended to be larger by employment status than by telework status, suggesting that a respondent's employment itself was a more salient indicator for differentiating the types of responses

households had to child care disruptions than the household members' telework status. The one exception to this pattern was for supervising children while working—households with someone who teleworked were more likely to supervise children while working compared to households with no members teleworking by 43 percentage points, the largest difference seen for both employment and telework status. This suggests that the ability to telework may have provided many families with extra flexibility to be able to supervise children while working compared to those who needed to be out of the home in order to work.

Limitations

While this report adds to our understanding of child care disruptions during the pandemic, there are several limitations to note:

- The HPS did not start asking about child care disruptions until April 2021 (Phase 3.1), and did not start asking about age of children in the household until July 2021 (Phase 3.2), so we are not able to assess child care disruptions for children under age 5 before July 2021. Additionally, for households with children in both age groups (i.e., under age 5 and ages 5 through 11), we are not able to distinguish whether child care disruptions occurred for their young children, older children, or both.
- The HPS data allow us to examine reported child care disruptions and responses to disruptions but do not allow us to examine structural factors that may be related to child care disruptions or responses to disruptions (e.g., child care closure policies, families' access to paid family/sick leave or telework).
- The HPS samples new groups of households each time it fields a survey—thus all reports of child care disruptions and responses to disruptions are point-in-time estimates. This means we are not able to assess the directionality of findings for household characteristics that vary over time. For example, we cannot assess whether the higher rate of child care disruptions among those who did not work in the past seven days was because respondents first experienced a child care disruption and subsequently stopped working, or whether respondents who were not working subsequently experienced a disruption.
- Our analyses examined the bivariate association of each of the key household characteristics with child care disruptions and responses to disruptions without accounting for other characteristics. The associations we found might be due to other confounding factors; for example, differences in child care disruptions by race and ethnicity may be driven by household income, which is associated with race and ethnicity on average.

Conclusions

Results from this study provide a national picture of the extent of child care disruptions among households with children under age 5, 1-2 years into the pandemic, and add to our knowledge of how the pandemic was experienced by households with different demographic characteristics. Findings highlight the importance of stability in child care arrangements for parents' ability to participate in the labor force. While much of the world resumes "normal" operations, parents with young children (particularly those from Black and Hispanic households, households with lower incomes, and households with only one adult, three or more adults, and with adults who are not employed) may continue to struggle with employment interruptions and/or participation to the extent that child care disruptions continue to occur. Given that the child care industry has not fully rebounded from the pandemic and that there is an ongoing early childhood workforce shortage,⁶⁵ child care closures are likely to continue. Findings also highlight that households with greater risk of child care disruptions may not have workplace and other financial supports to help them mitigate the negative impacts of ongoing child care disruptions.

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