

THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON LGBTQ HOUSEHOLDS IN THE U.S.

RESULTS FROM A JULY/AUGUST 2020 NATIONAL POLL



This report was authored by:

Movement Advancement Project

MAP's mission is to provide independent and rigorous research, insight and communications that help speed equality and opportunity for all people. MAP works to ensure that all people have a fair chance to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, take care of the ones they love, be safe in their communities, and participate in civic life. For more information, visit www.lgbtmap.org.

Contact Information

Movement Advancement Project

1905 15th Street #1097
Boulder, CO 80306
1-844-MAP-8800
www.lgbtmap.org

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This report's findings are based on a polling series called *The Impact of Coronavirus on Households*, conducted by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (NPR/RWJF/Harvard). As reported by Harvard, "Interviews were conducted online and via telephone (cellphone and landline), July 1–August 3, 2020, among a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 3,454 adults age 18 or older in the U.S. Data collection was conducted in English and Spanish by SSRS (Glen Mills, PA), an independent research company. The margin of sampling error, including the design effect, was ± 3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for national data." Findings from the series, as well as additional methodological information, are available at www.hsph.harvard.edu/horp/npr-harvard.

Of the total sample of 3,454 adults, 353 identified as LGBTQ. This report details the experiences of those LGBTQ individuals and their households. The Movement Advancement Project is grateful to NPR/RWJF/Harvard for conducting this poll and to Harvard staff for sharing these data on LGBTQ households.

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DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON LGBTQ HOUSEHOLDS IN THE UNITED STATES

RESULTS FROM A JULY/AUGUST 2020 NATIONAL POLL



SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN...



SERIOUS FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

66% of LGBTQ households have had a serious financial problem vs. 44% of non-LGBTQ households, including:

- Paying utilities like gas or electric
- Affording medical care
- Paying credit card bills, loans, or other debt



INCREASED CHALLENGES NAVIGATING WORKING & HAVING CHILDREN AT HOME

52% of LGBTQ households with children were having trouble keeping their children's education going vs. 36% of non-LGBTQ households with children

29% of LGBTQ households had serious problems with internet connection to do work or schoolwork at home vs. 17% of non-LGBTQ households



GREATER EMPLOYMENT DISRUPTION

64% of LGBTQ households experienced employment loss vs. 45% of non-LGBTQ households, including:

- Having lost a job or business, or been furloughed
- Having wages or hours reduced or taking a mandatory unpaid leave

64% of LGBTQ people in households where they or someone else has to leave the house for non-healthcare work had serious concerns about COVID safety at work vs. 46% of non-LGBTQ people



MORE CHALLENGES ACCESSING HEALTH CARE

38% of LGBTQ households have been unable to get medical care or delayed getting medical care for a serious problem vs. 19% of non-LGBTQ households

INTRODUCTION

Since the COVID-19 pandemic first disrupted nearly all aspects of life in the United States in March 2020, LGBTQ people have been particularly vulnerable both to the virus itself and to the economic and social upheaval it has brought to our lives. From March through June, MAP released a [series of Medium posts](#) exploring the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on LGBTQ people and other vulnerable groups. For example, research finds that LGBTQ people, particularly people of color and those raising children, experience higher rates of economic insecurity generally and are more likely to face employment discrimination on the job and when seeking jobs. LGBTQ people also are more likely to face barriers to good health during the best of times, including lower rates of health insurance, higher rates of some chronic illnesses, and experiences of discrimination by healthcare providers.

In July/August 2020, NPR, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (NPR/RWJF/Harvard) conducted a five-part polling series to examine the impact of COVID-19 on households in the United States. The poll included a question allowing respondents to identify as LGBTQ. This report summarizes the key findings about the experiences of LGBTQ people and their households in

this broader national poll and offers comparisons to the non-LGBTQ respondents.^a MAP is grateful to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health for sharing these data.

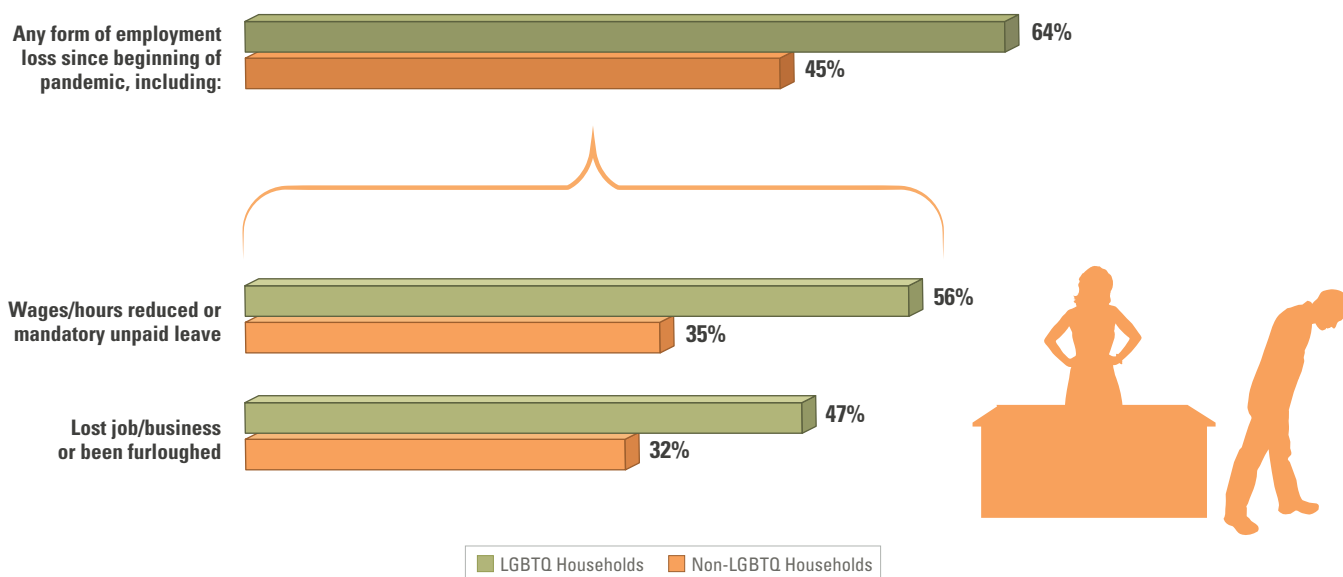
What emerges in this poll is that LGBTQ people and their families are more likely to experience job losses and economic challenges resulting from the pandemic, that they are more likely to have health challenges from the pandemic, including not getting needed medical care, and that they are struggling to manage work and childcare responsibilities—all at higher rates than non-LGBTQ people.

HIGHER RATES OF JOB LOSSES AND UNCERTAINTY

LGBTQ people and their families are experiencing higher rates of job loss and disruption during the pandemic, as shown in *Figure 1*. In total, 64% of LGBTQ people said they or an adult in their household has had employment loss compared to 45% of non-LGBTQ people. This is particularly troubling given that LGBTQ people report higher rates of employment discrimination generally and may struggle to find new jobs.¹

^a Respondents were asked both about their sexual orientation and gender identity. This report compares respondents who identified as LGBTQ and/or transgender to those who identified as both heterosexual and cisgender (i.e., “non-LGBTQ”).

Figure 1: Nearly Two-Thirds of LGBTQ Households Have Experienced Employment Loss Since the Pandemic



Source: NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. July-August 2020. *The Impact of Coronavirus on Households* polling series. Data on LGBTQ households provided to MAP.

Additionally, specific groups within the LGBTQ community are experiencing even higher rates of job or wage loss. For example, *Figure 4a* on page 5 shows that while 64% of all LGBTQ households have had job or wage loss, that number rises to 71% in Latino LGBTQ households. Similarly, *Figure 4b* shows that 68% of lower-income LGBTQ households (<\$30,000 per year) have experienced job loss or disruption, compared to 44% of high-income LGBTQ households (those making \$100,000 or more per year).

As shown in *Figure 4c*, LGBTQ people in the Midwest have been particularly hard hit, with 82% of LGBTQ people in the Midwest saying they'd experienced job loss or disruption, compared to 67% of LGBTQ Southerners, 62% of LGBTQ people in the West, and 38% of LGBTQ people in the Northeast.

Overall, these numbers are less surprising given previous research by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which found that 40% of LGBTQ adults work in the five industries which have been hardest hit by COVID, compared to 22% of non-LGBTQ people: restaurants and food services, hospitals, K-12 education, colleges and universities, and retail.² In an April/May 2020 survey by HRC and PSB, one-third (33%) of LGBTQ people had their hours reduced, with higher rates for LGBTQ people of color (38%),³ transgender people (54%), and transgender people of color (58%).⁴

In the NPR/RWJF/Harvard poll, 47% of all LGBTQ people say they have serious concerns about their safety at work with regards to the Coronavirus, compared to 28% of non-LGBTQ people. Looking just at households with healthcare workers, nearly all (89%) LGBTQ households with healthcare workers report serious concerns about their safety from the virus at work, compared to 56% of non-LGBTQ households with healthcare workers. Of households with someone who leaves the house to do non-healthcare work, 64% of LGBTQ people have serious concerns about safety from the virus, compared to 46% of non-LGBTQ people.

GREATER ECONOMIC UPHEAVAL AND INSECURITY

Research by the Williams Institute finds that LGBTQ people collectively have a higher poverty rate than non-LGBTQ people.⁵ This research finds that lesbian women have similar rates of poverty to heterosexual women, but both groups of women have higher rates of poverty

than both gay men and non-LGBTQ men. What's more, transgender people face a staggering poverty rate of 29.4%, according to the U.S. Transgender Survey, and in both rural and urban areas, transgender people face higher economic insecurity than their neighbors.⁶

Consistent with this past research, the NPR/RWJF/Harvard poll finds that LGBTQ respondents are twice as likely as non-LGBTQ respondents to have very low incomes: 22% of LGBTQ respondents reported incomes under \$15,000, compared to 11% of non-LGBTQ respondents. LGBTQ people are also more likely to have incomes under \$50,000 (62% vs. 47% of non-LGBTQ respondents).

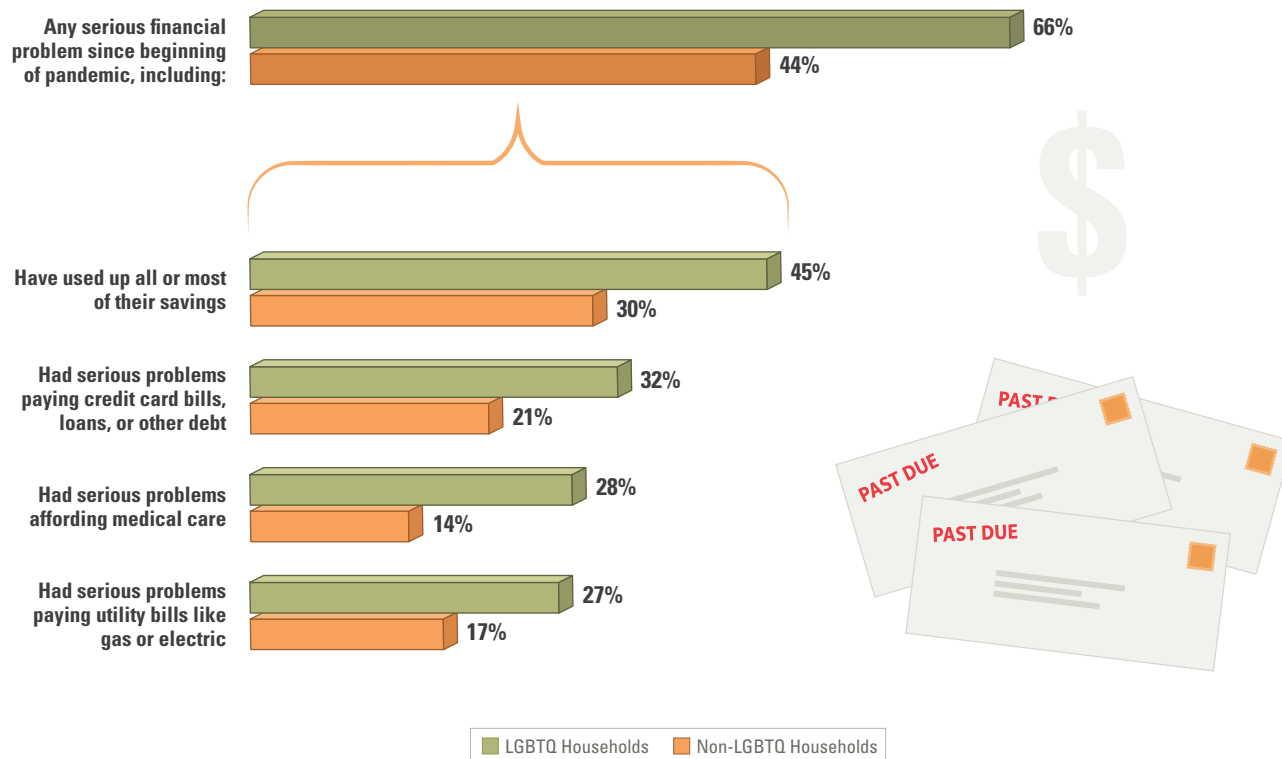
Given this economic landscape, it is no surprise that **during the pandemic, LGBTQ people are far more likely to be experiencing serious financial problems.** Two-thirds (66%) of LGBTQ households have had at least one serious financial problem since the pandemic began, compared to 44% of non-LGBTQ households, as shown in *Figure 2*.

Consistent with national trends⁷, this new poll also finds that Black and Latino LGBTQ households report even higher rates of serious financial problems since the start of the pandemic than their white LGBTQ counterparts: nearly all (95%) of Black LGBTQ respondents and 70% of Latino LGBTQ respondents indicated that they or someone in their household experienced one or more serious financial problems, as shown in *Figure 4a* on page 5. These numbers are higher than the poll found in Black and Latino households generally. Additionally, as shown in *Figures 4b* and *4c*, 78% of lower-income LGBTQ households and 78% of LGBTQ households in the Midwest report at least one serious financial problem since the pandemic's onset.

In further measures of insecurity, nearly one in five (19%) LGBTQ households reported they were not getting enough food to eat every day since the pandemic began, compared to 6% of non-LGBTQ households. This is again consistent with past research that finds that LGBTQ people, particularly LGBTQ people of color and those with disabilities, are more likely than their peers to experience food insecurity.⁸

One-quarter (25%) of LGBTQ people said that, since the pandemic began, their home has had serious heating or cooling problems, mold problems, pest problems, problems with unsafe drinking water, or other serious environmental problems in their home, compared to

Figure 2: Two-Thirds of LGBTQ Households Have Experienced at Least One Serious Financial Problem Since the Pandemic



Source: NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. July-August 2020. *The Impact of Coronavirus on Households* polling series. Data on LGBTQ households provided to MAP.

10% of non-LGBTQ people. Notably, more than half (56%) of LGBTQ respondents rent their homes compared to just one-third (34%) of non-LGBTQ people.

DEEPER CHALLENGES WITH ACCESSING HEALTH CARE

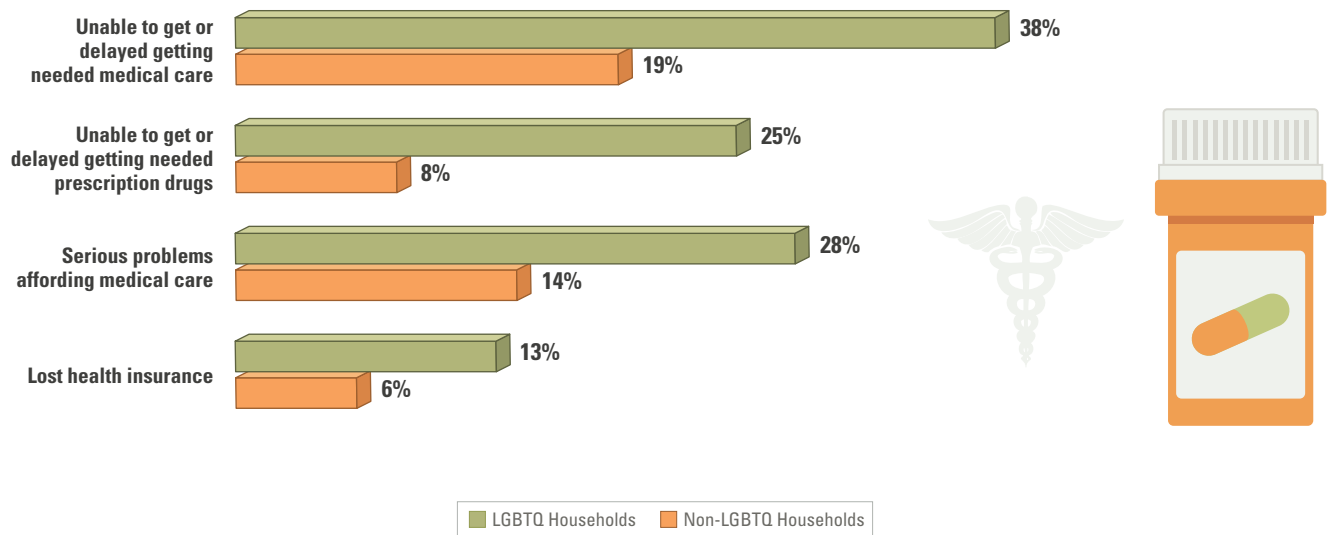
LGBTQ people often report barriers to accessing competent health care. For example, a nationally representative survey by the Center for American Progress found that 8% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults and 29% of transgender adults said they had been turned away from a health care provider because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁹

Since the pandemic began, LGBTQ people have experienced even further obstacles to accessing healthcare, as shown in *Figure 3*. The NPR/RWJF/Harvard poll shows that more than one in eight (13%) LGBTQ people have lost health insurance coverage since the start of the outbreak, more than twice the rate of non-LGBTQ people (6%). Additionally, more than one in four (28%) LGBTQ households have had serious problems

affording medical care, and again at a rate twice as high as non-LGBTQ households (14%).

In the NPR/RWJF/Harvard poll, and as shown in *Figure 3*, nearly two in five (38%) LGBTQ households have been unable to get or have had to delay getting medical care for a serious problem when they needed it during the outbreak, compared to 19% of non-LGBTQ households. More than one-quarter (28%) of all LGBTQ households were both unable to get the health care they needed and had a negative health consequence as a result compared to 10% of non-LGBTQ households. One-quarter (25%) of LGBTQ households also reported they were unable to get or delayed getting prescription drugs for a major health issue during the pandemic, compared to 8% of non-LGBTQ households (*Figure 3*).

As with other negative impacts of the COVID pandemic, LGBTQ people of color and LGBTQ households in the South and Midwest have been particularly hard hit. More than half (54%) of Black LGBTQ people indicated they or someone in their household had been unable to get medical care or had delayed care

Figure 3: LGBTQ Households at Least Twice as Likely to Report Serious Obstacles to Accessing Health Care During the Pandemic

Source: NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. July-August 2020. *The Impact of Coronavirus on Households* polling series. Data on LGBTQ households provided to MAP.

(Figure 4a), and 46% of Southern LGBTQ households have been unable to get or had to delay needed medical care since the pandemic began (Figure 4c).

INCREASED STRUGGLES NAVIGATING WORK, SCHOOL, CHILDREARING, AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Among LGBTQ people who are employed and are working from home at least some of the time, 18% say they have serious problems working from home compared to 7% of non-LGBTQ people. More than one-quarter (29%) of LGBTQ people, compared to 17% of non-LGBTQ respondents, had serious problems with internet connection to do work or schoolwork.

This new poll finds that among all LGBTQ respondents, more than four in ten (44%) said they or someone in their home has had a serious problem coping with social and physical isolation, compared to less than one in four (23%) non-LGBTQ people. Previous research shows that LGBTQ people are more likely to live alone and to lack an extended family network they can turn to for support. In California, for example, the Williams Institute estimates that 39% of LGB people and 33% of transgender people over the age of 65 live alone, compared to 23% of heterosexual adults ages 65 or older.¹⁰ LGBT older adults were half as likely to

have life partners or significant others; half as likely to have close relatives to call for help; and four times less likely to have children to provide care. During this time of social distancing, this can leave them particularly vulnerable because they may have no one to count on to pick up groceries or prescriptions, to check on them, or to provide vital social connection.

CONCLUSION

As the pandemic continues to drastically alter life in the United States, it continues to reveal—and deepen—disparities that have long existed. This is true for the racial disparities in health care and the labor force that have resulted in higher infection and death rates and shockingly high rates of unemployment and economic distress. These new polling data reveal that LGBTQ people and their households, especially LGBTQ people of color and low income LGBTQ people, are also particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. These findings point to the need for targeted assistance and explicit protections from discrimination as our country continues to weather the storm and looks to rebuild.

Figure 4: The Impacts of Coronavirus on LGBTQ Households Vary By Race, Income, and Region
 % of households reporting each type of experience since the pandemic

Figure 4a: LGBTQ Households—Especially Black and Latino LGBTQ Households—Have Been Harder Hit by COVID

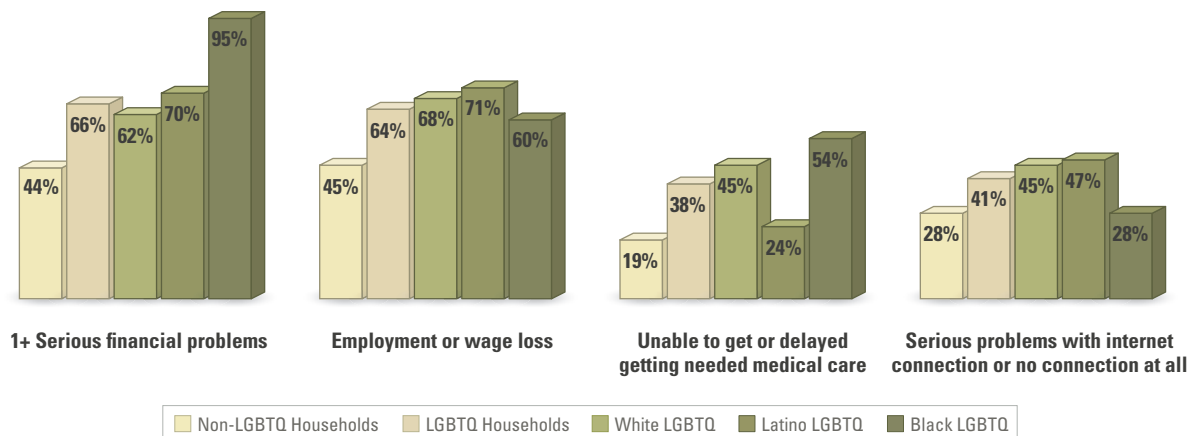


Figure 4b: LGBTQ Households—Especially Lower-Income LGBTQ Households—Have Been Harder Hit by COVID

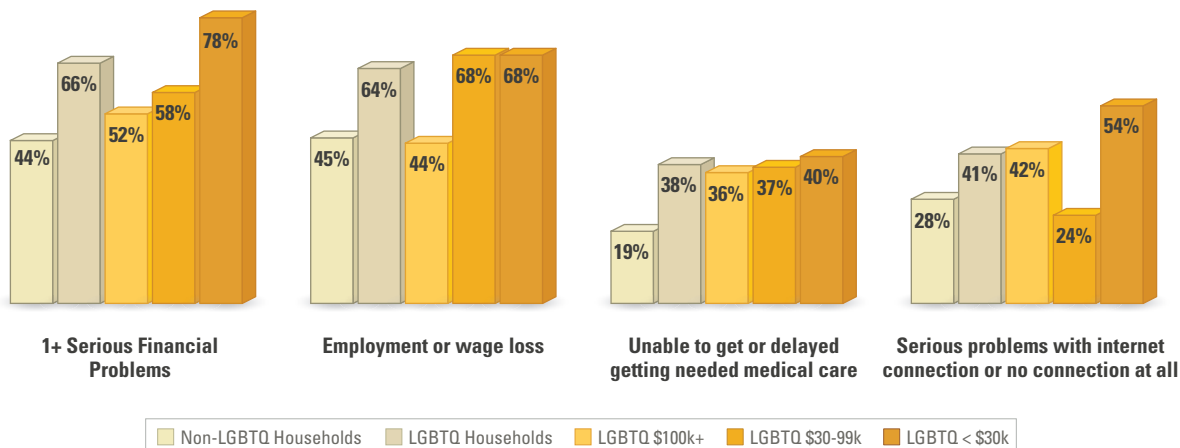
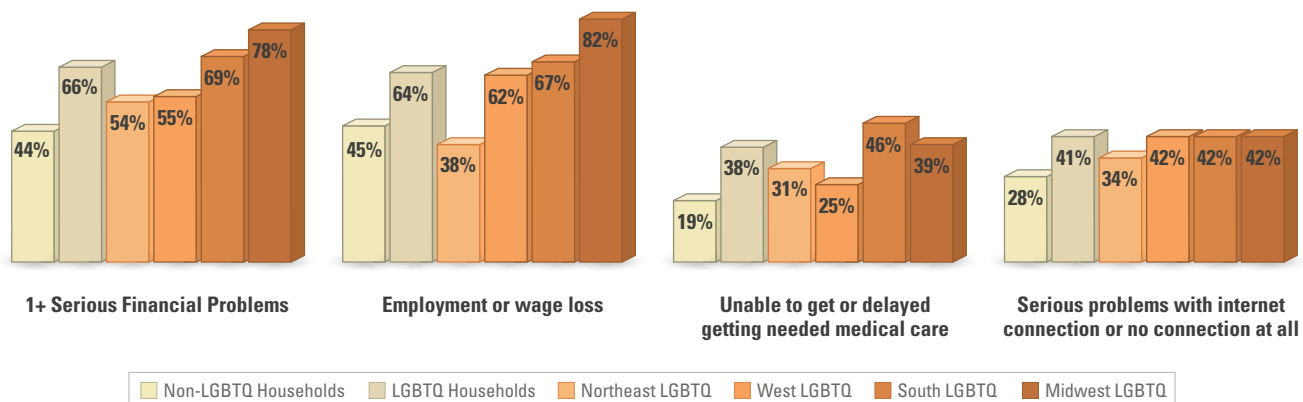


Figure 4c: LGBTQ Households—Especially in the Midwest and South—Have Been Harder Hit by COVID



Source: NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. *The Impact of Coronavirus on Households*, 7/1/20 – 8/3/20.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See, for example: NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. November 2017. [Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans](#).
- ² Human Rights Campaign Foundation. March 2020. [The Lives & Livelihoods of Many in the LGBTQ Community Are At Risk Amidst COVID-19 Crisis](#).
- ³ Human Rights Campaign Foundation and PSB. 2020. [The Impact of COVID-19 on LGBTQ Communities of Color](#).
- ⁴ Human Rights Campaign Foundation and PSB. 2020. [The Economic Impact of COVID-19 Intensifies for Transgender and LGBTQ Communities of Color](#).
- ⁵ M.V. Lee Badgett, Soon Kyu Choi, and Bianca D.M. Wilson. October 2019. [LGBT Poverty in the United States](#). *The Williams Institute*.
- ⁶ Movement Advancement Project. November 2019. [Where We Call Home: Transgender People in Rural America](#).
- ⁷ See, for example, Yaphet Getachew, Laurie Zephyrin, Melinda K. Abrams, Arnav Shah, Corinne Lewis, and Michelle M. Doty. September 2020. [Beyond the Case Count: The Wide-Ranging Disparities of COVID-19 in the United States](#). *The Commonwealth Fund*.
- ⁸ Taylor N.T. Brown, Adam P. Romero, and Gary J. Gates. July 2016. [Food Insecurity and SNAP Participation in the LGBT Community](#). *The Williams Institute*.
- ⁹ Shabab Ahmed Mirza and Caitlin Rooney. January 2018. [Discrimination Prevents LGBTQ People From Accessing Health Care](#). *Center for American Progress*.
- ¹⁰ Ilan H. Meyer and Soon Kyu Choi. April 2020. [Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 Among Older LGBT Adults in California](#). *The Williams Institute*. MAP analysis of 2019 California Health Interview Survey.



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1905 15th Street #1097 • Boulder, CO 80306-1097
1-844-MAP-8800
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