

OF PANDEMICS, POLICIES, AND CULTURE CHANGE: FAMILY ECONOMICS AND THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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(With additional thanks to Lia Fernald, Monica Ellwood-Lowe, Mahesh Srinivasan and their co-authors)



THREE TOPICS

1. How government pandemic policies relevant to young children and families coincided with rates of material hardship on a national survey
2. Associations between material hardship and
 - parenting
 - parent wellbeing
 - child development & well-being
3. How what we know might inform policy, and how *culture change research* might inform and increase the impact of our efforts

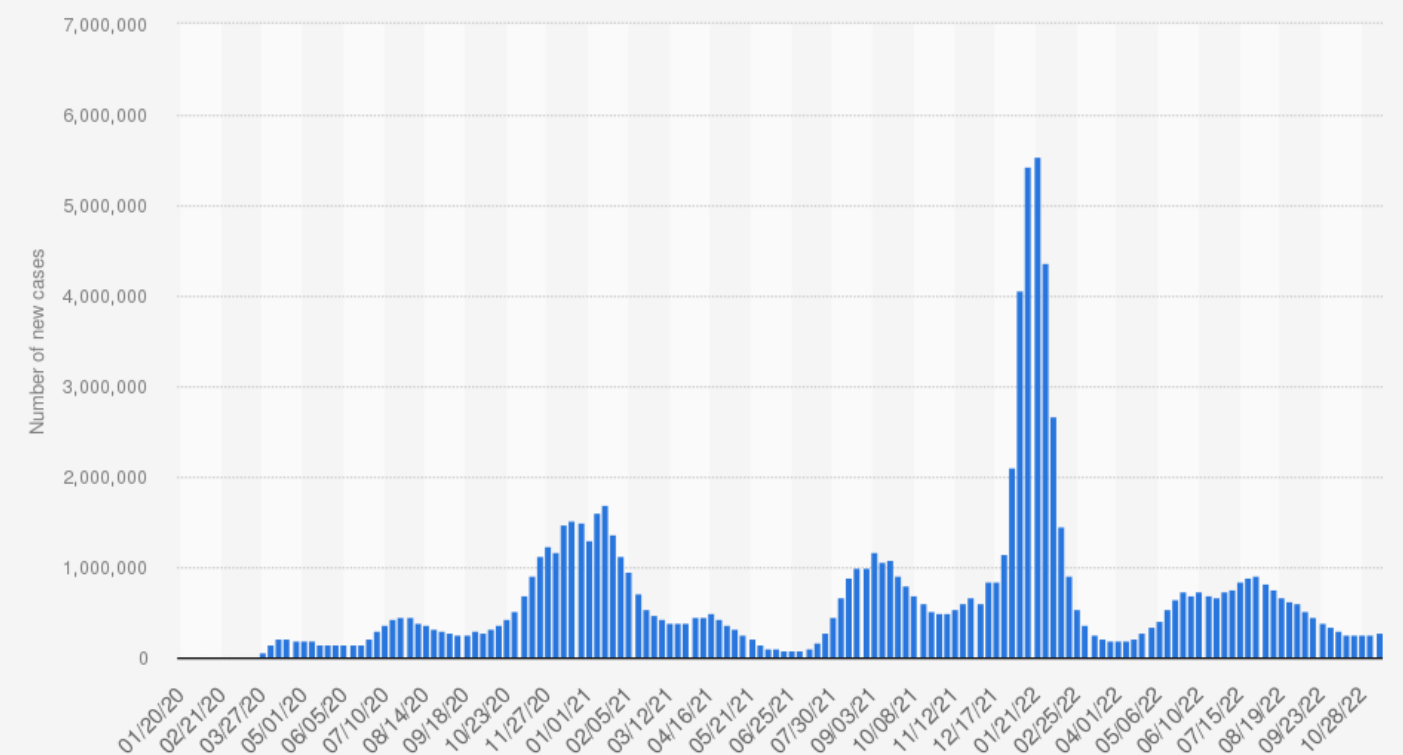
TheUpshot

The U.S. Built a European-Style Welfare State. It's Largely Over.

By [Claire Cain Miller](#) and [Alicia Parlapiano](#) April 6, 2023

The New York Times

Number of new cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States from January 20, 2020 to November 11, 2022, by week



Source
WHO
© Statista 2022

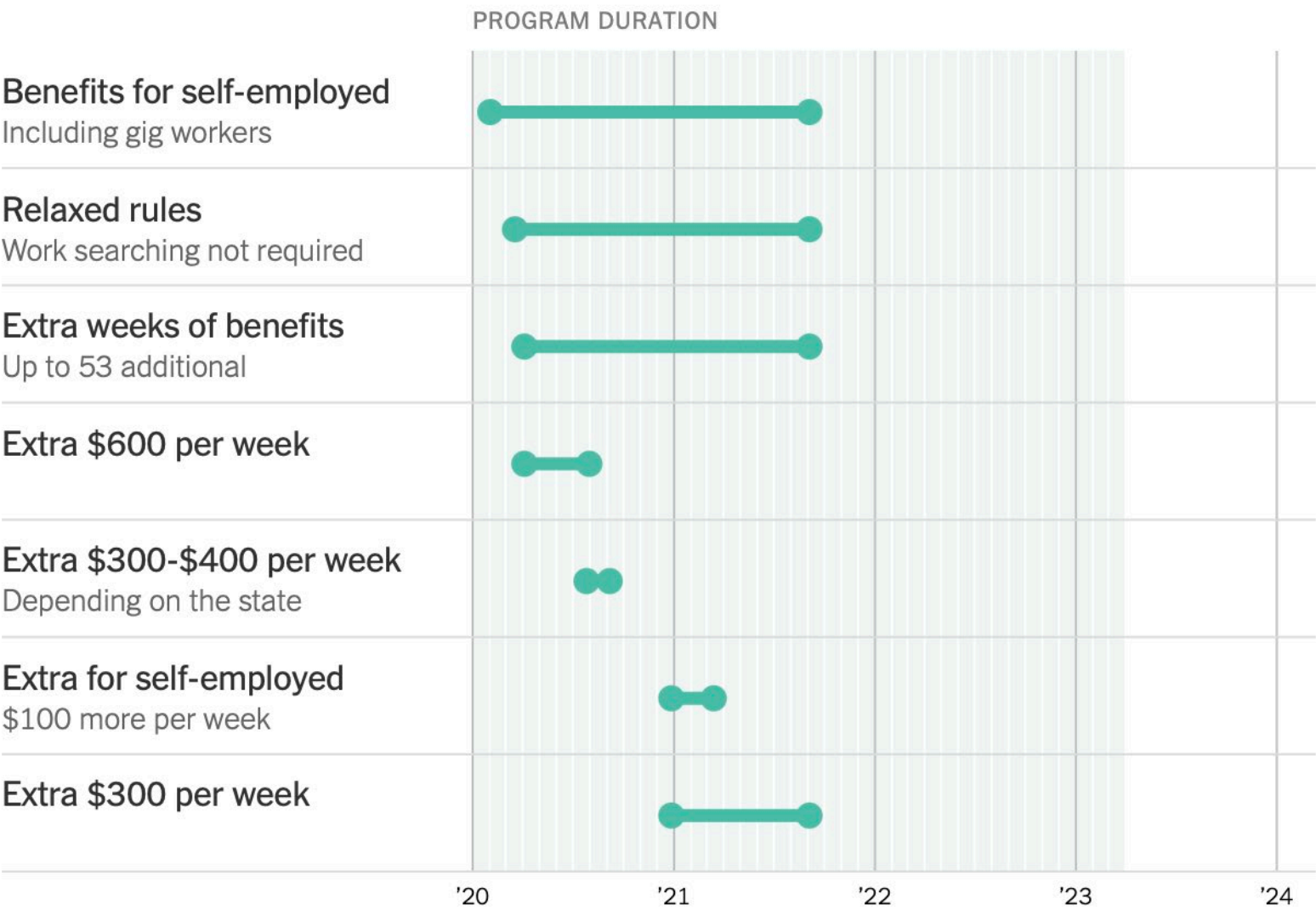
Additional Information:
United States; January 20, 2020 to November 11, 2022

Most Safety Net Programs Started During the Pandemic Have Ended

A much more generous safety net was rapidly constructed, starting in 2020, but most of the programs have ended or are set to expire soon.

Unemployment

All of the major unemployment program changes, which expanded eligibility and smoothed differences between state programs, ended by September 2021, though many states stopped providing expanded benefits before that.

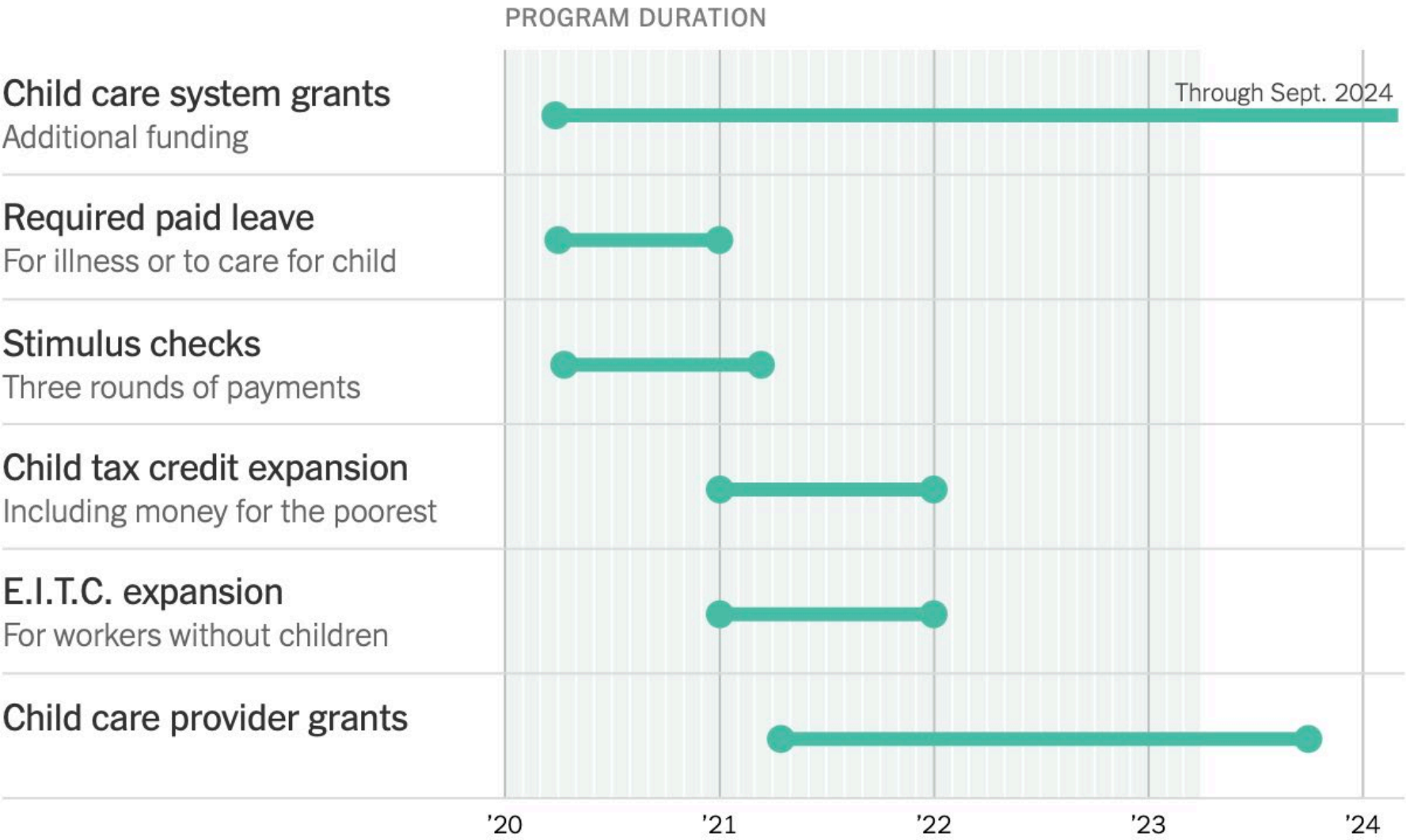


Most Safety Net Programs Started During the Pandemic Have Ended

A much more generous safety net was rapidly constructed, starting in 2020, but most of the programs have ended or are set to expire soon.

Children and Families

Many of these policies expanded existing programs, but it was the first time the federal government added a paid leave requirement for certain employers.



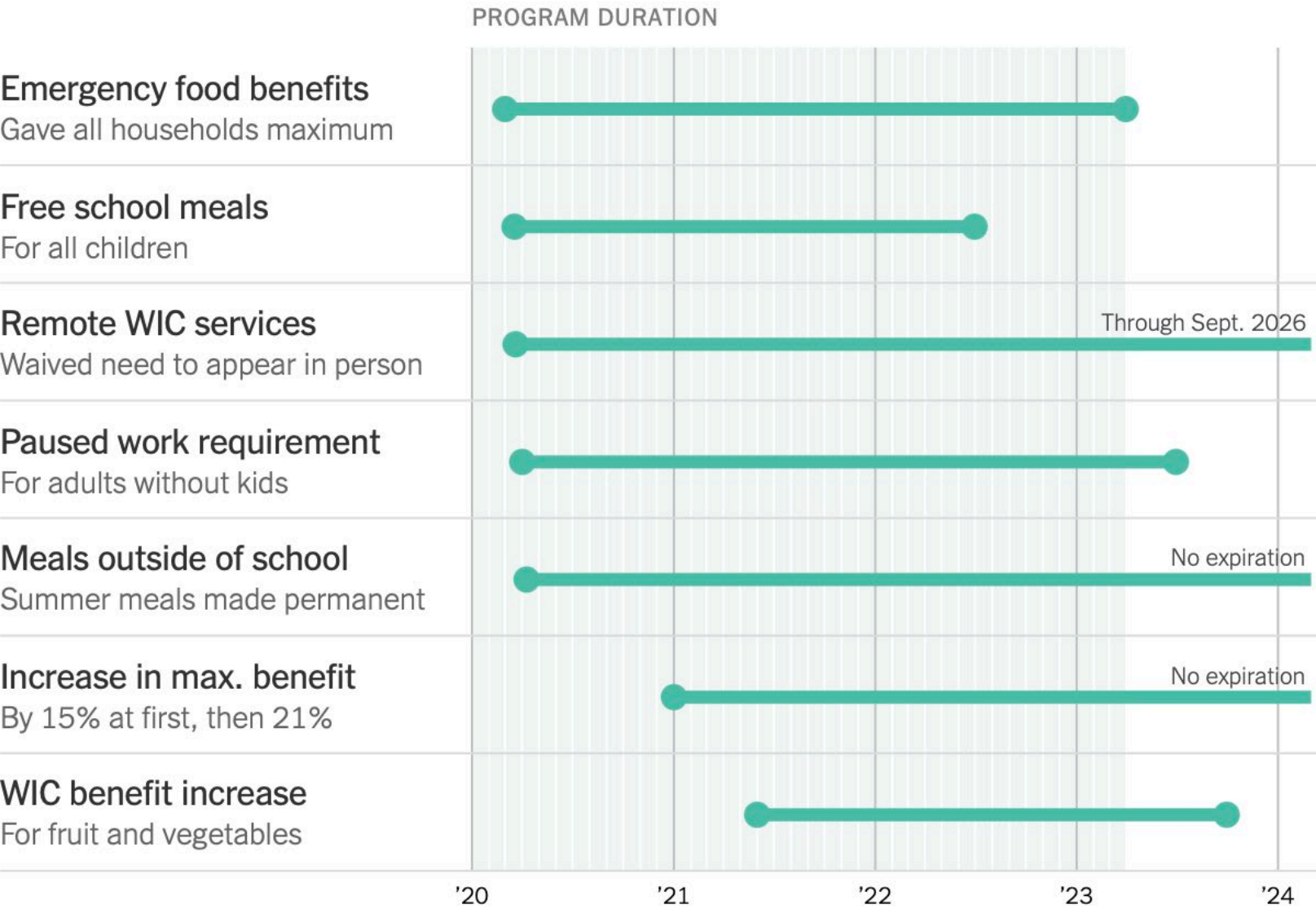
Note: E.I.T.C. refers to the earned-income tax credit.

Most Safety Net Programs Started During the Pandemic Have Ended

A much more generous safety net was rapidly constructed, starting in 2020, but most of the programs have ended or are set to expire soon.

Food Assistance

One pandemic-era benefit that will continue: Around the time that states were ending an increase in the maximum food stamp benefit, the Biden administration prompted a lasting increase by revising the program’s nutrition standards.



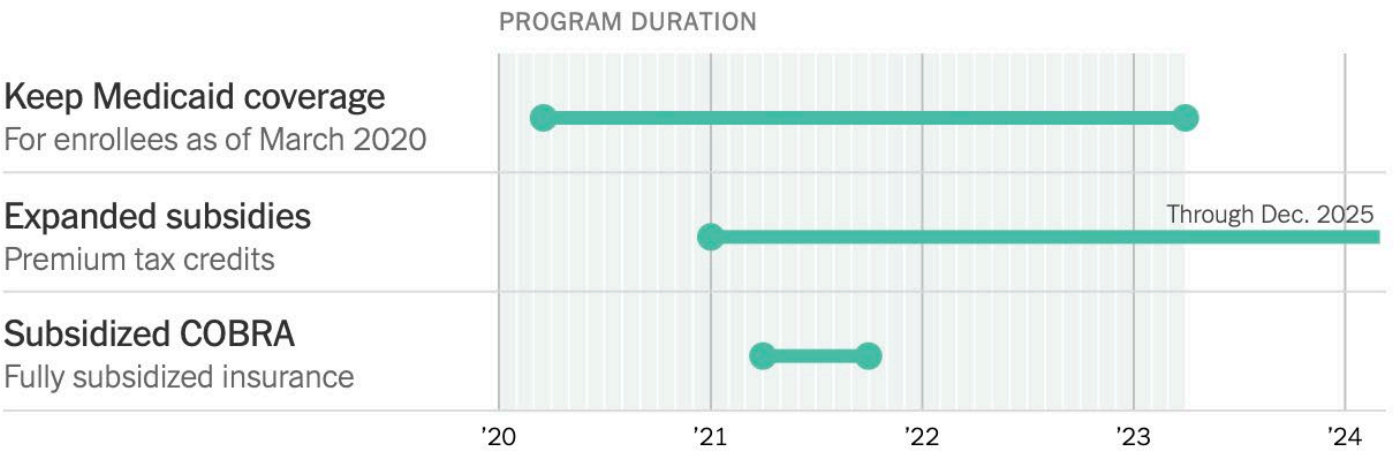
Note: WIC refers to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. States may choose to continue some policies, like the suspension of the food benefit work requirement, after the federal policy lapses.

Most Safety Net Programs Started During the Pandemic Have Ended

A much more generous safety net was rapidly constructed, starting in 2020, but most of the programs have ended or are set to expire soon.

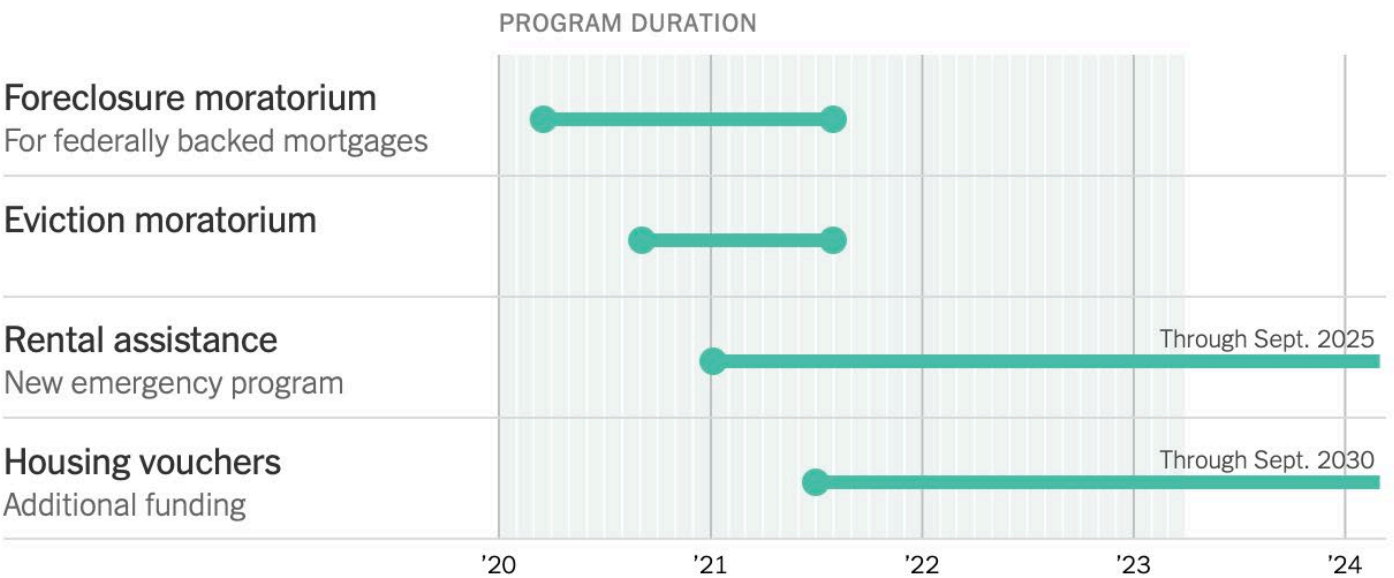
Health Care

A policy that did not allow Medicaid enrollees to lose coverage during the pandemic [began phasing out this week](#), though states could take up to 14 months to redetermine who is eligible.



Housing

The government started a new rent and utility assistance program during the pandemic, but the funds expire in September 2025.



Note: While funding for emergency housing vouchers is available through September 2030, vouchers cannot be issued to new households after September of this year.

Comments 351

The comments section is closed. To submit a letter to the editor for publication, write to letters@nytimes.com.



AnneW

Seattle | April 8

\$ National Debt

\$ 8,000,000,000,000 Middle East Wars for Oil since W Bush

\$ 1/2 of the discretionary portion of every annual budget goes toward the military

55 Corporations paid no federal income taxes on 2020 profits (numbers of non-paying corporations varies yearly often exceeding 55)

92 Recommend Share

Flag



Bradley

The World | April 11

We can have a more comprehensive welfare state if...

We lower unskilled immigration.

Heavily increase taxes.

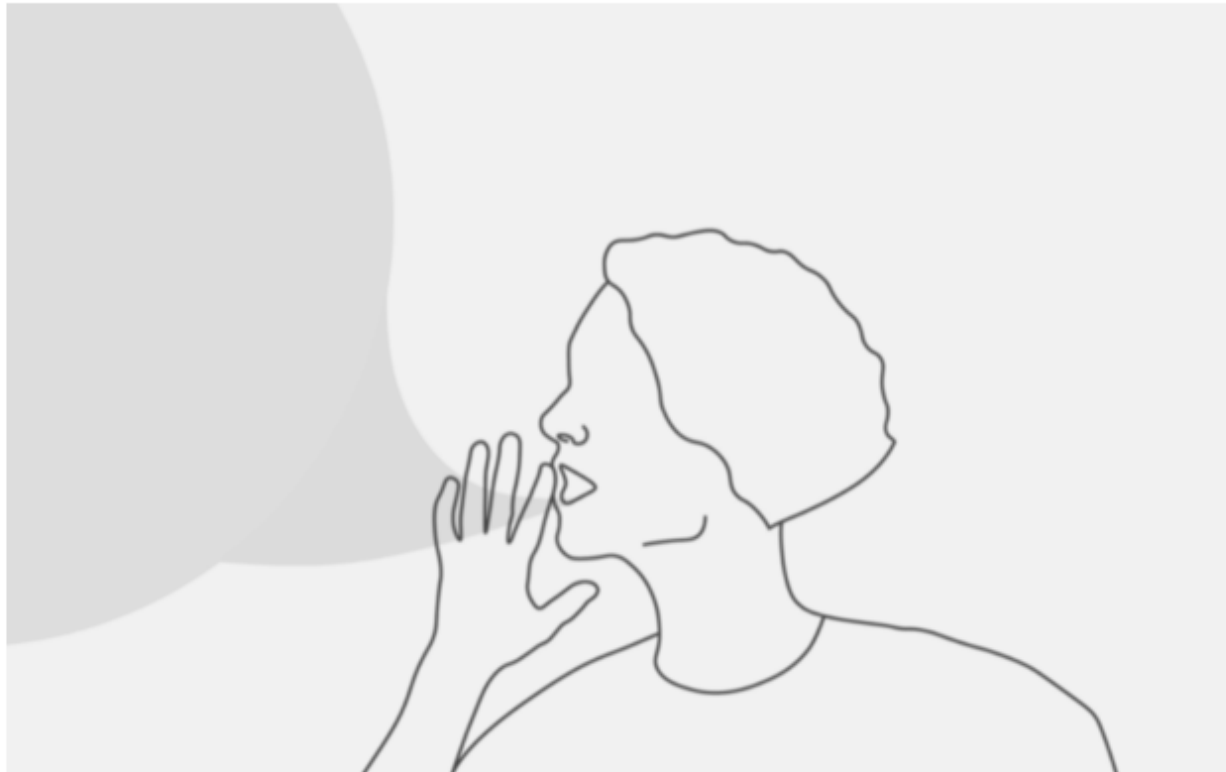
Centralize services to reduce complexity and bloat.

Change the average citizen's mind that these will benefit them.

Good luck!

How have these policies been affecting the economic circumstances and well-being of families with young children?

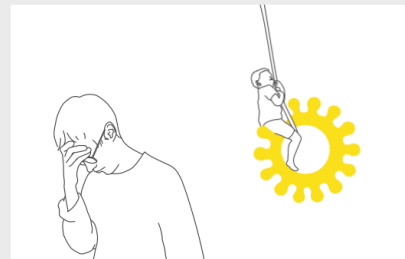
RAPID



<https://rapidsurveyproject.com>



ABOUT RAPID



Why Households with Young Children Warrant Our Attention and Support During (and After) the COVID-19 Pandemic

by Philip Fisher, Joan Lombardi, & Nathaniel Kendall-Taylor



Implications and conclusions
The pandemic has disproportionately affected women in the workforce, and our data shows that this is also true for women in households with young children.

Overall, we found a third of women with young children were forced to stop/reduce work during the pandemic, even though most we surveyed said they couldn't afford to do so.

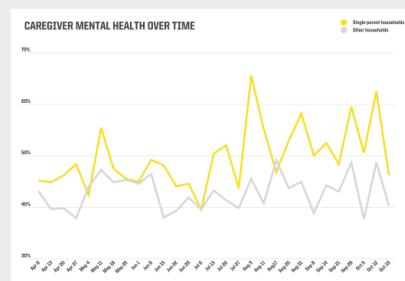
Overall, women who were forced to stop/reduce work were significantly more likely to be unable to afford it, and these differences indicate structural inequalities based on race/ethnicity.

Overall, women who were forced to stop/reduce work had elevated levels of emotional distress. This was especially true of those who said they couldn't afford to do so but were still the case among those who said they could.

This finding is particularly noteworthy because it suggests that for mothers of young children, regardless of their income, not working or working less during the pandemic may be a stressor, and conversely that having a desired level of work may confer emotional benefits. We will be exploring these issues in greater detail in the future.

"It is difficult to do the best thing at the same time. You still need someone to take care of your child even if you are working from home. Little children need that supervision and it is difficult to do it while working."
Mother in New York

"My job has laid me off and I can't find another one. I need to work but it's just not feasible while doing remote learning and lack of affordable childcare."
Mother in Colorado



STIMULUS PAYMENTS WERE ESSENTIAL FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Many American households with young children have been experiencing significant difficulties paying for basic needs like food, shelter, and utilities since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Data from our RAPID-EC national survey of families with young children shows that has been occurring as a result of these difficulties—parents who can't pay for basic needs are experiencing more emotional distress, and when parents are struggling, our data shows that their children also experience more emotional distress.

88%
of families received the first stimulus check

82%
of families received the second stimulus check



RAPID-EC
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

No Shelter From The Storm
Higher Income Isn't Protecting Black And Latinx Families From Financial And Material Hardship During The Pandemic

This week we provide an update on material hardship in families with young children during the pandemic. We look at overall trends in our nationally representative sample of households with young children and the extent to which household income going into the pandemic has protected families against material hardship. We also examine how experiences of material hardship differ between groups of families.

RAPID Survey
Apr 14, 2022 · 7 min read · Listen

How the Child Tax Credit Affected Families with Young Children

From July to December 2021, millions of American families received monthly payments through an expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC). Throughout that period, we used the RAPID survey to collect data from 3,953 families with young children on their experiences with the CTC. Listening to this diverse sample of families (in terms of race, ethnicity, income, and geography) helps tell the story of how the CTC affected American families with young children. We now look back at these stories to explore families' experiences with the monthly CTC payments before, during, and after their distributions.

CHILD CARE DISRUPTIONS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED PARENTS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND ABILITY TO WORK, WHICH FURTHER IMPACTED CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING.

Parents who had difficulty finding care for their children reported significantly higher levels of emotional distress compared to those who did not report child care difficulties. Additionally, 75% of parents reported that difficulty finding child care has impacted their ability to work.

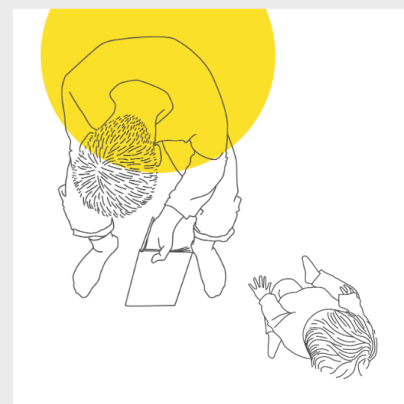
As we have reported previously, parents' emotional well-being directly influences their child's emotional well-being. In January 2022, parents' elevated emotional distress was significantly associated with children's increased emotional distress.

The cancellation/closure of child care centers/programs also negatively affected parents' emotional well-being. In January 2022, providers who experienced cancellation/closure reported significantly higher levels of emotional distress than those who did not experience cancellation/closure. For providers, like with parents and families, child care closures and cancellations may mean that work schedules have been inconsistent or a loss of income. The effect of these disruptions is to undermine families' and child care providers' sense of stability and routine, and to introduce additional stressors into their everyday lives. We will continue to monitor trends in parent, child and provider well-being, and household and provider economic well-being this year.

"My biggest concern right now is to keep the preschool community safe. To prevent COVID cases. To have access for CTCD centers for the community. To survive financially I am have to close due to COVID."
Provider in Minnesota

"My biggest concern right now is to keep the preschool community safe. To prevent COVID cases. To have access for CTCD centers for the community. To survive financially I am have to close due to COVID."
Provider in California

"It is difficult to do the best thing at the same time. You still need someone to take care of your child even if you are working from home. Little children need that supervision and it is difficult to do it while working."
Mother in New York



<https://rapidsurveyproject.com>

Bearing witness: Continuing national surveys of adults in the lives of young children.

RAPID launched in April 2020 to understand and address the experiences and challenges that caregivers of young children were facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2023, we continue to field monthly national surveys and elevate the voices of adults in the lives of young children, to provide timely, actionable data to advocates, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

Made with
readymag

RAPID

OVERVIEW OF RAPID NATIONAL SURVEYS

Ongoing, monthly survey. Households with at least one child under age 6. Began April 6, 2020

Added parallel national child care provider/ECE survey in 2021

15-minute paid questionnaires completed via computer or smartphone in English or Spanish

Quantitative and **open-ended** questions

National sample in terms of **geography, income and race/ethnicity**

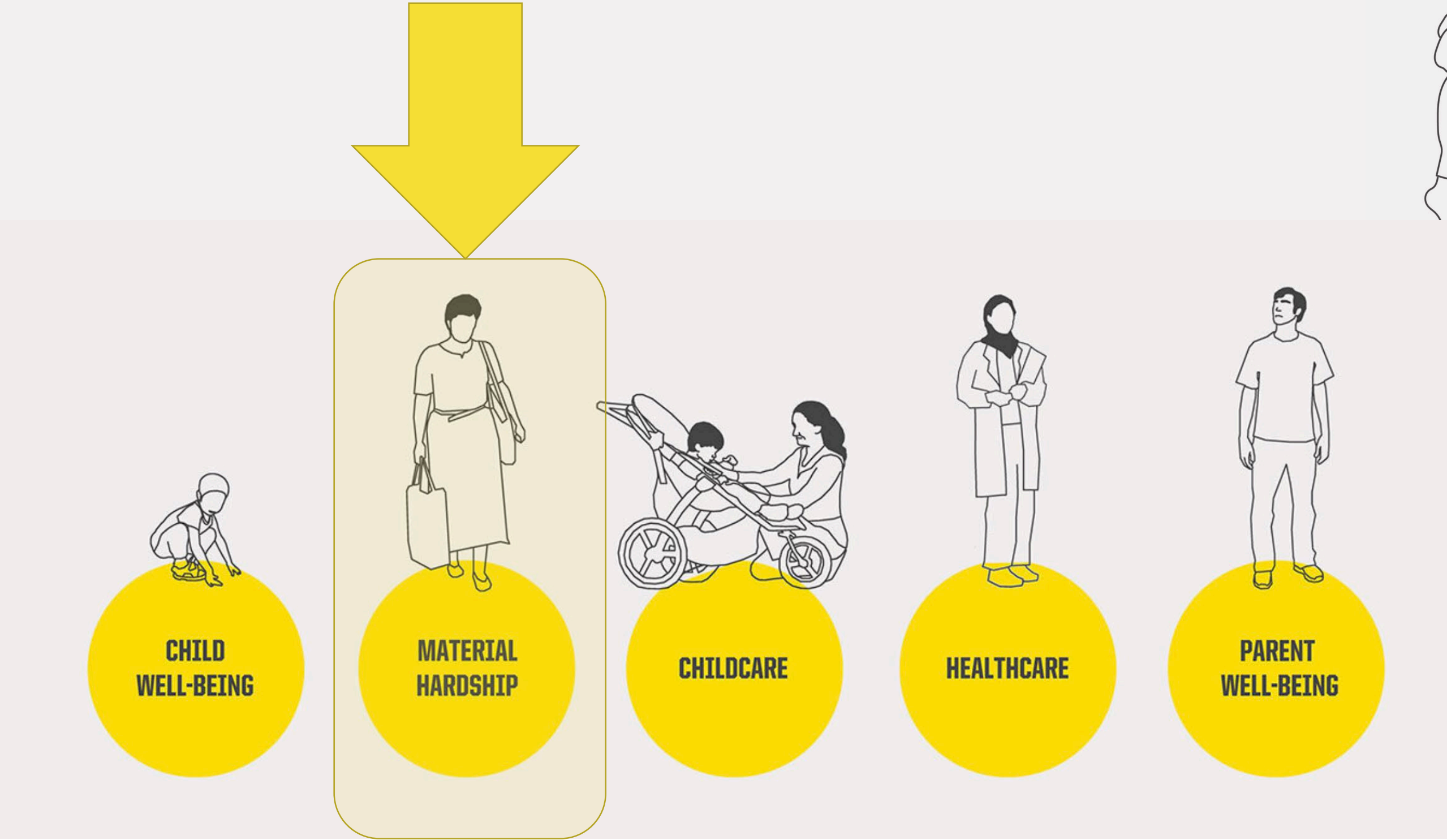
16,000+ households and **3,200+** providers in all 50 states

Over **100 surveys** launched to date

0-5
focus

RAPID
cycle

RAPID SURVEY CORE CONTENT



MATERIAL HARDSHIP

- Increasingly used as an alternative or supplemental measure to income and FPL
- Material hardship measures families' ability to meet basic needs
- Income measures may lack reliability (especially in lower income, more occupationally volatile contexts)
- Income measures don't take into account wealth, debt, ability to obtain credit (all of which are associated with structural racial inequalities)
- Changes in income are not always associated with changes in hardship



MATERIAL HARDSHIP

- RAPID asks about families' difficulties paying for basic needs in the prior month within the following domains :

Food

Utilities

Housing (Rent/Mortgage)

Child Care

Healthcare

Other basic needs



MATERIAL HARDSHIP OVER TIME

We measure material hardship by asking families to indicate whether they are having difficulty paying for basic needs in one or more of the following categories:

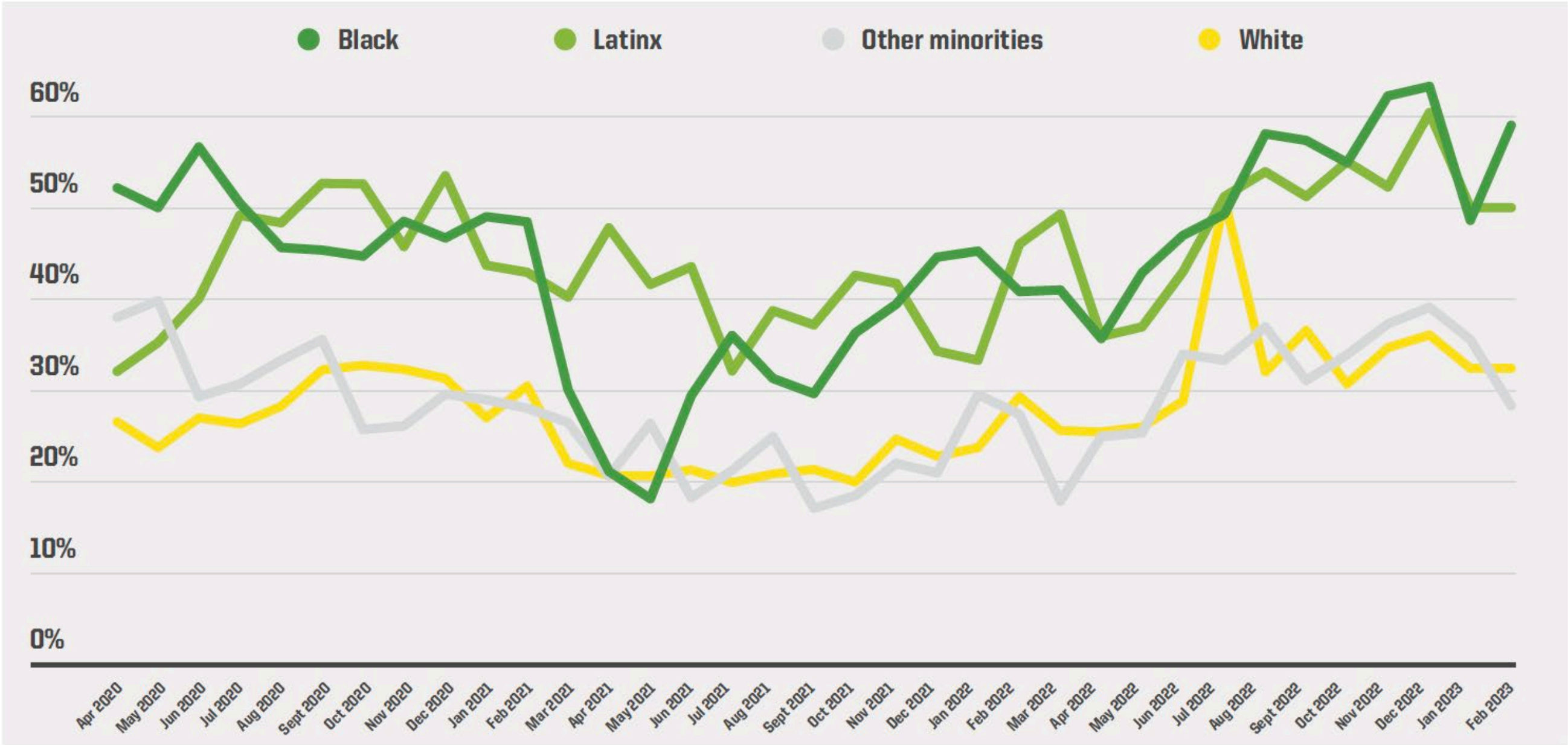
- Food
- Housing (mortgage or rent)
- Utilities
- Childcare
- Medical Care
- Other

We present the percentage of participants who select one or more hardship.



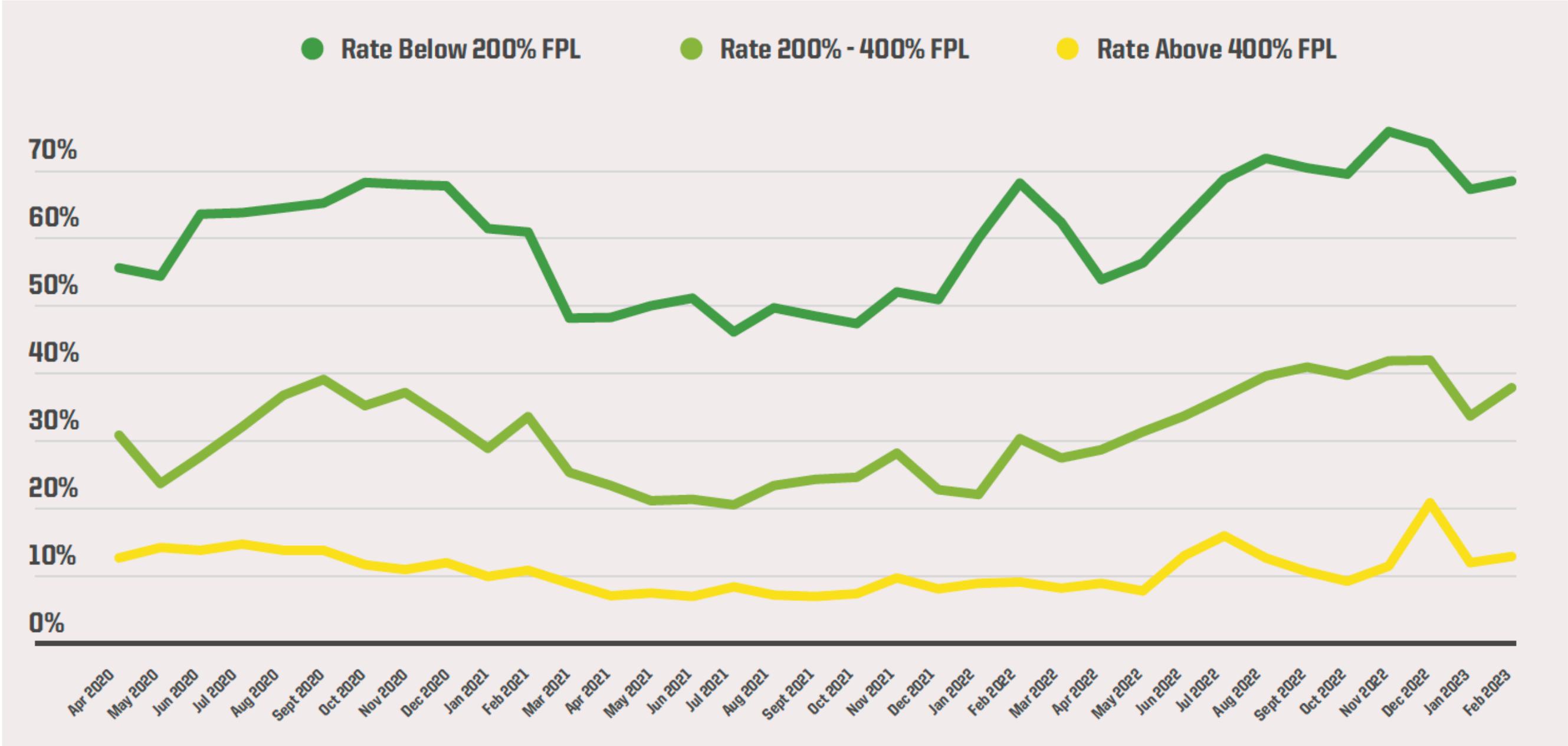
PERSISTENT EVIDENCE OF STRUCTURAL RACIAL/ETHNIC INEQUALITIES IN EXPERIENCES OF MATERIAL HARDSHIP

Trend of material hardship rate by race/ethnicity



DISPARITIES IN HARDSHIP ALSO BASED ON PRE-PANDEMIC INCOME LEVELS

Trend of material hardship rate by income levels



ALIGNING RAPID TREND DATA AND POLICY TIMELINES*

*Disclaimer: VISUALIZATION \neq CAUSATION

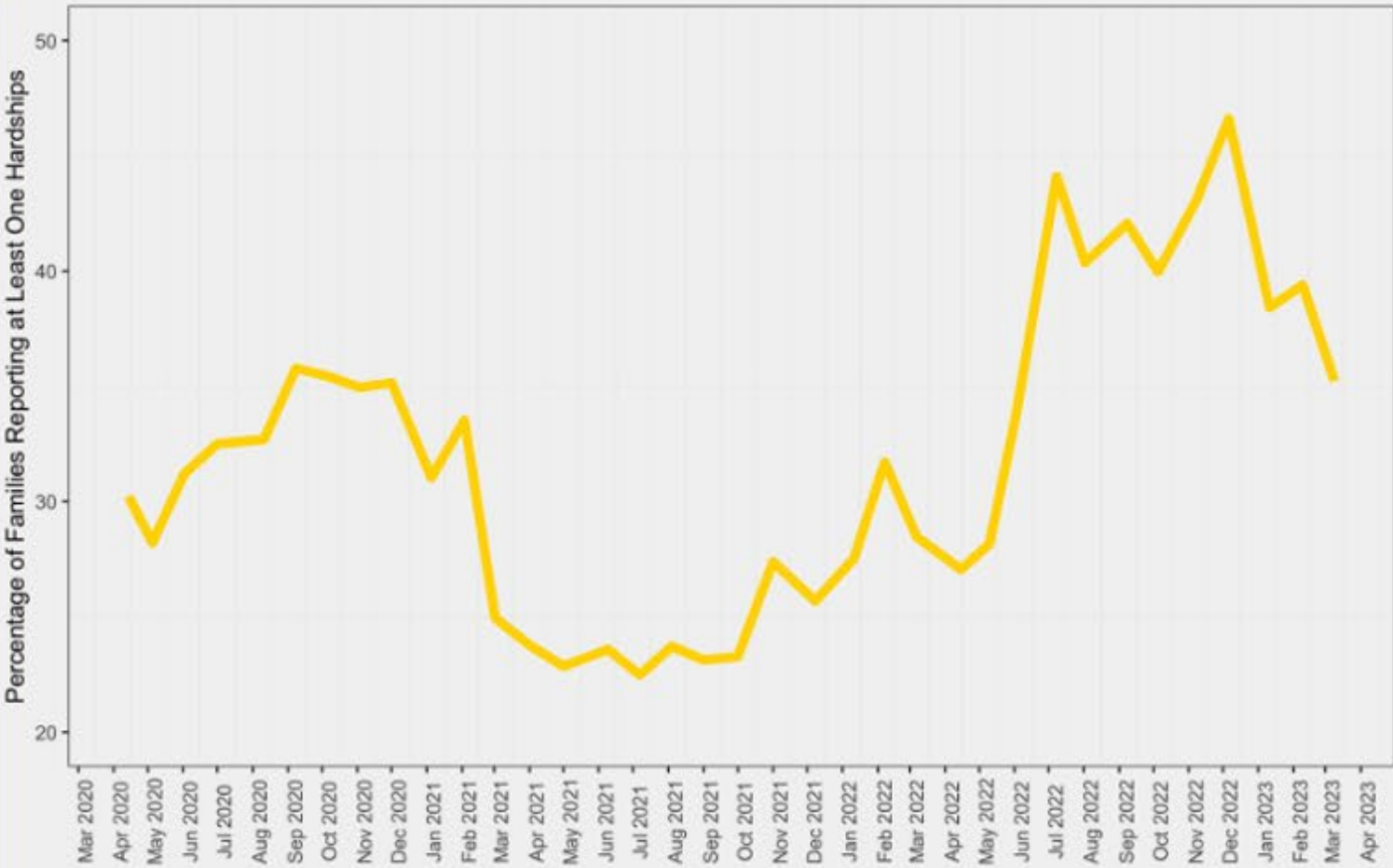
Material Hardship Trend Over Time

RAPID DATA

We measure material hardship by asking families to indicate whether they are having difficulty paying for basic needs in one or more of the following categories:

- Food
- Housing (mortgage or rent)
- Utilities
- Childcare
- Medical Care
- Other

We present the percentage of participants who select one or more hardship.



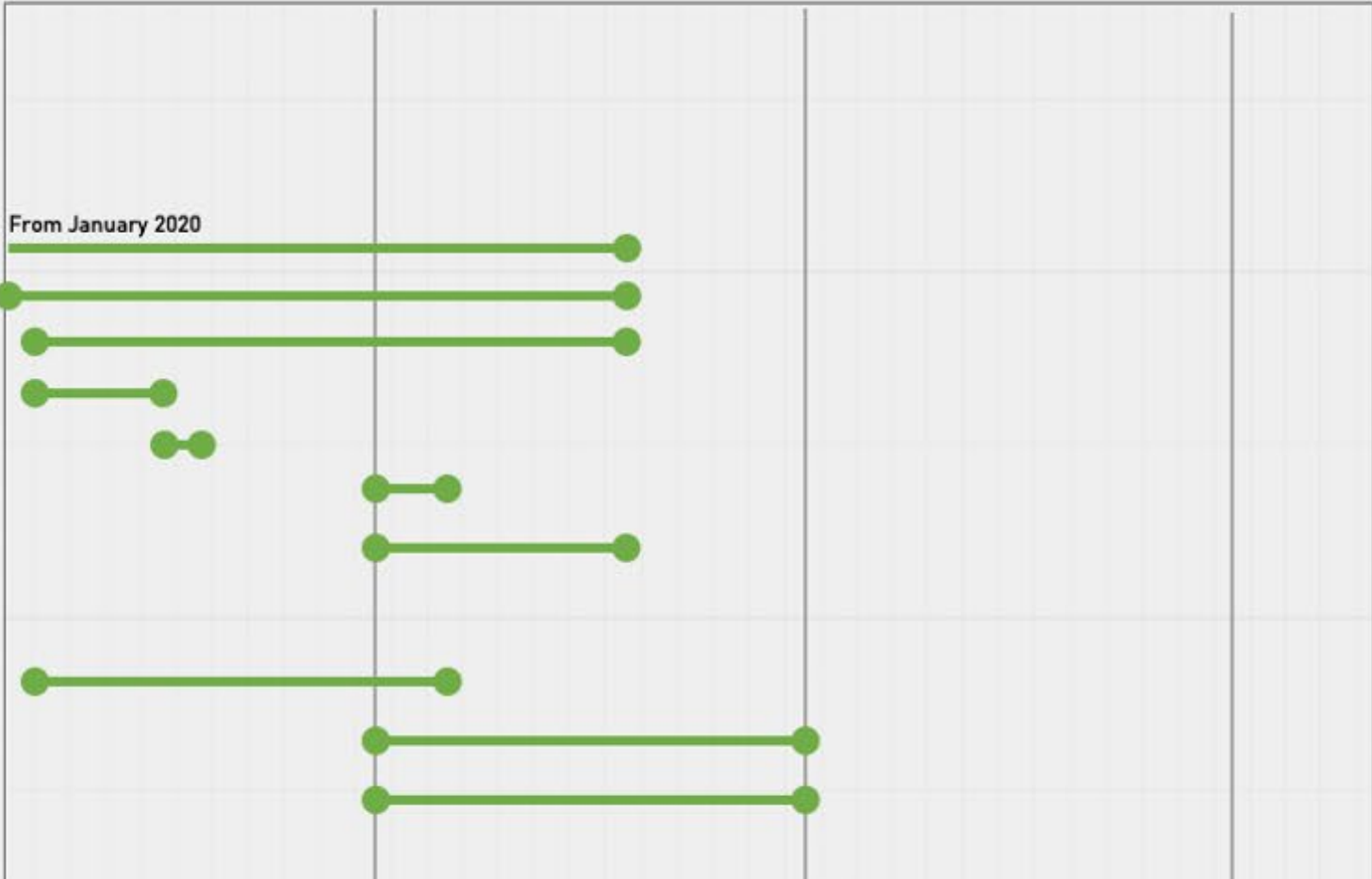
POLICY TIMELINE

Unemployment

- Self-employed qualify
- Relaxed rules
- Extended duration
- Extra \$600/week
- Extra \$300-\$400/week
- Extra for self-employed
- Extra \$300/week

Children and Families

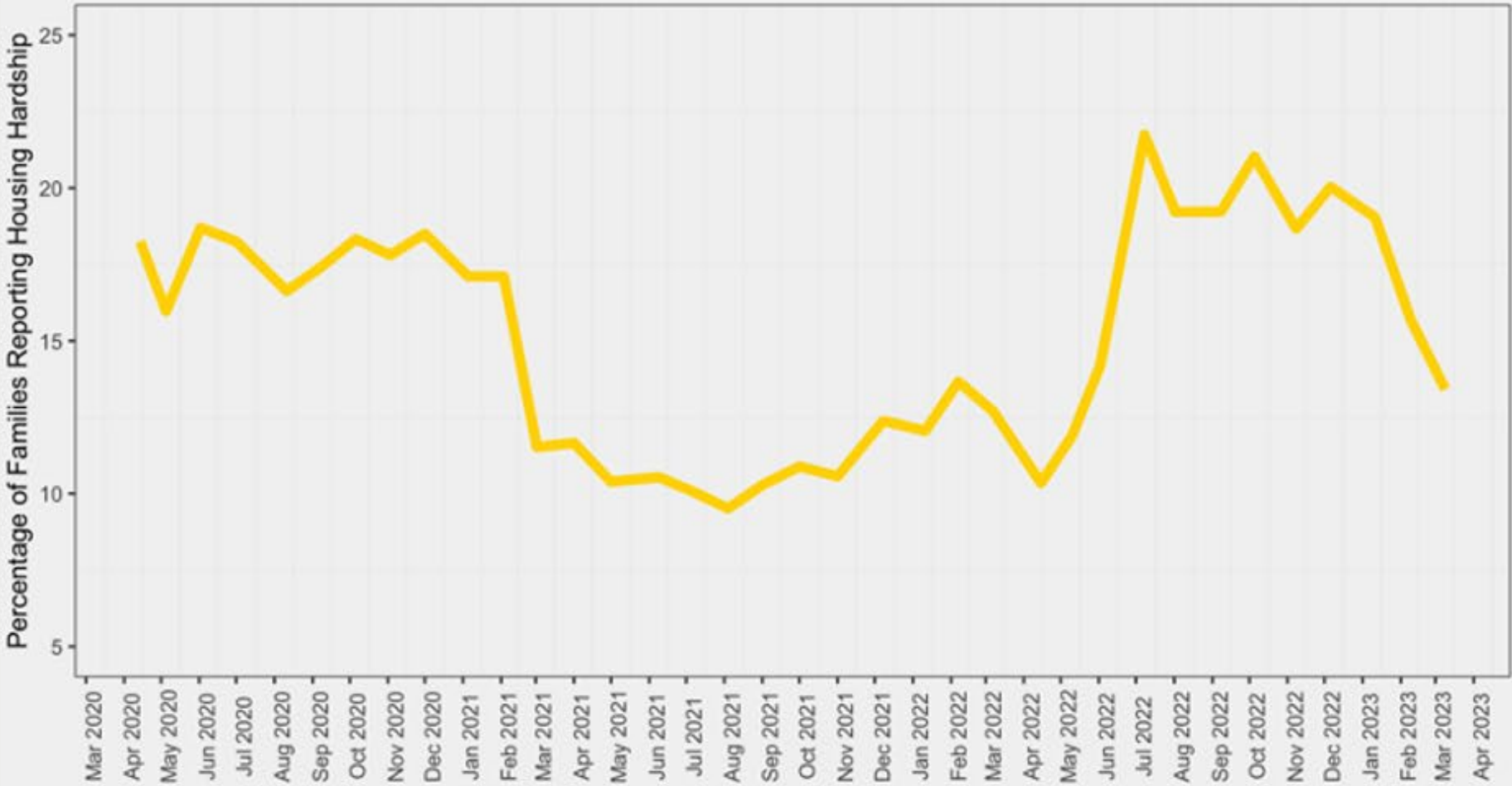
- Stimulus checks
- Child tax credit expansion
- E.I.T.C. expansion



Housing Hardship Trend Over Time

RAPID DATA

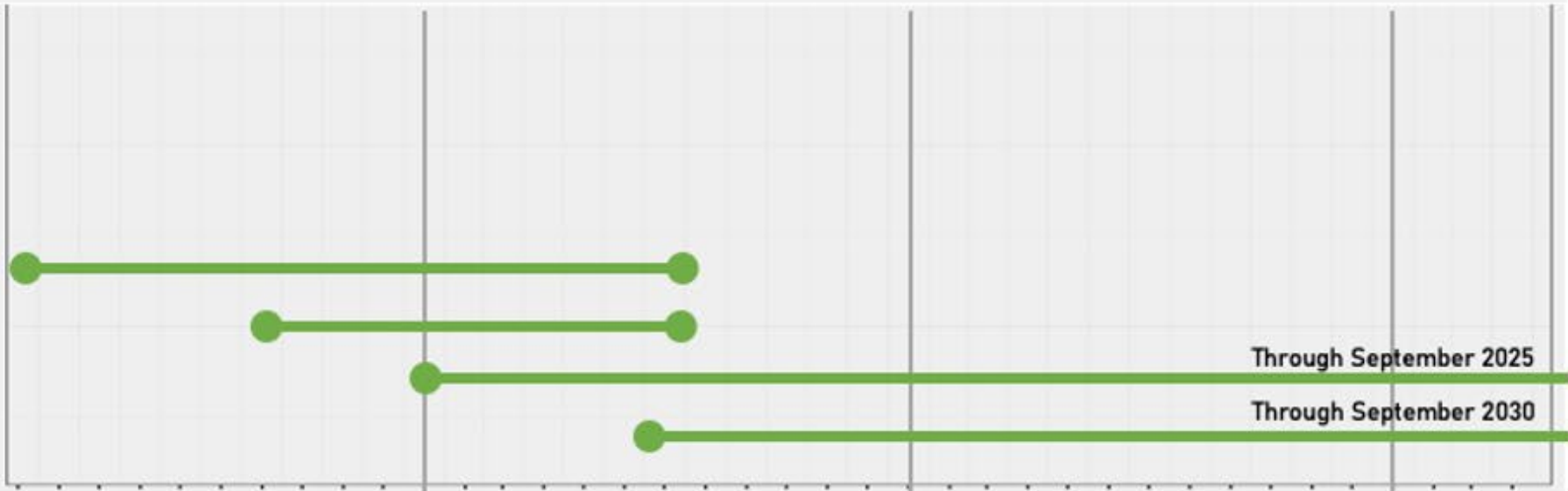
We measure housing hardship by asking families to indicate whether they are having difficulty paying housing expenses, including rent and mortgage. Percentages of participants who indicated housing hardships are reported in this chart.



POLICY TIMELINE

Housing

- Foreclosure moratorium
- Eviction moratorium
- Rental assistance
- Housing vouchers



Food Hardship & Hunger Trend Over Time

RAPID DATA

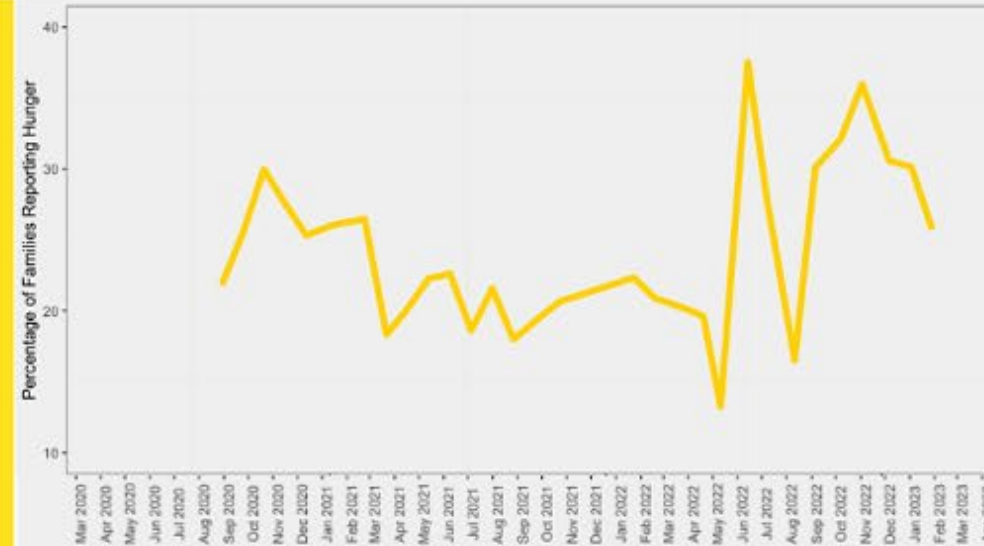
Food Hardship

We measure food hardship by asking families to indicate whether they are having difficulty paying for food. Percentages of participants who indicated food hardships are reported in this chart.



Hunger

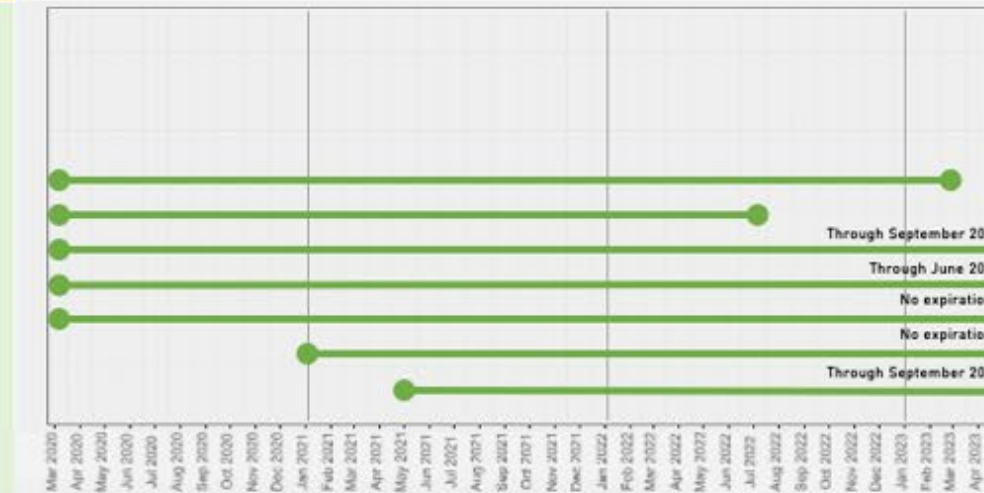
We measure food insecurity using the USDA Food Insecurity 6-item scale. For each household, we calculated a total score on these six items and classified participants as experiencing hunger if they reported two or more of these experiences. (i.e., if they have a score equal to or greater than 2).



POLICY TIMELINE

Food Assistance

Emergency food benefits
Free school meals
Remote WIC services
Paused work requirement
Meals outside of school
Food benefit increase
WIC increase



CONCLUSION #1

Among households with young children, onset and offset of pandemic-related government policies appear to coincide with rates of material hardship:

- *Some* pandemic-related unemployment and child & family-based assistance policies coincided with reduced overall material hardship rates
- *Some* housing policies (especially those involving financial assistance) coincided with reduced housing hardship rates
- *Some* food assistance benefits coincided with reduced hunger and food insecurity

MOREOVER, OVER THE LONG TERM...

Expanded Safety Net Drives Sharp Drop in Child Poverty

With little public notice and accelerating speed, child poverty fell by 59 percent from 1993 to 2019, according to a comprehensive new analysis that shows the critical role of increased government aid.

When Stacy Tallman's family in Marlinton, W.Va., had a financial crisis, the government safety net allowed her to weather it without her child falling into poverty.

 Give this article



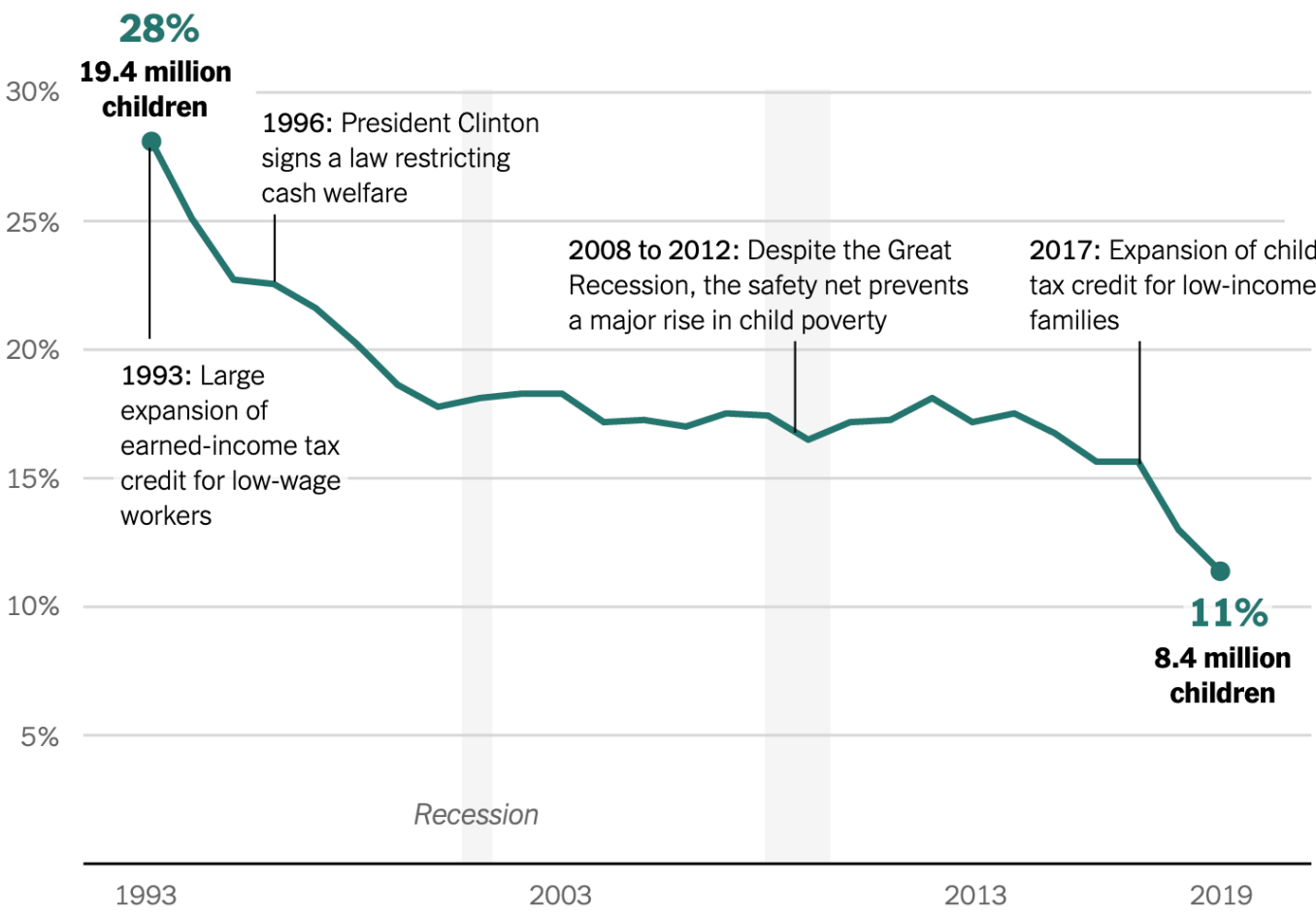


 394

By Jason DeParle Photographs by Maddie McGarvey
For this article, the reporter worked closely for five months with researchers from a nonpartisan group to document the decline in child poverty and the forces pushing it lower.
Sept. 11, 2022

The Downward Trajectory of Child Poverty

Millions fewer children are considered poor today than were a quarter-century ago, according to the Supplemental Poverty Measure, a rate calculated by the Census Bureau that best takes government aid into account.



Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Census Bureau and the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University • By Alicia Parlapiano

AND YET...

RAPID data show that many of the observed impacts of pandemic related economic policies on families with young children were subsequently mitigated as expanded CTC ended and by other economic forces (esp. steep rise in cost of consumer goods) beginning in fall/winter 2021

And...

Temporary Pandemic SNAP Benefits Will End in Remaining 35 States in March 2023

FEBRUARY 6, 2023 | BY [DOTTIE ROSENBAUM](#), [KATIE BERGH](#) AND [LAUREN HALL](#)

[PERSONAL FINANCE](#)

SNAP

Add Topic +

SNAP benefits in 2023 to end extra cash for food benefits provided during the pandemic



Medora Lee
USA TODAY

Published 5:44 p.m. ET Feb. 26, 2023 | Updated 6:35 p.m. ET Feb. 26, 2023



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County Administration

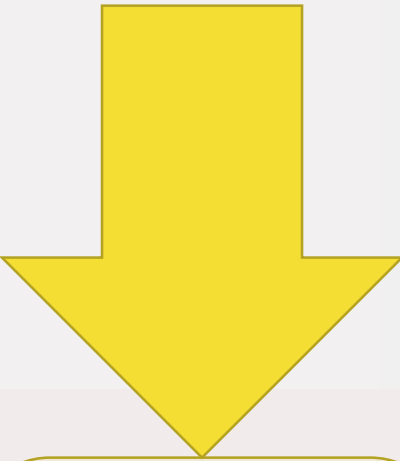
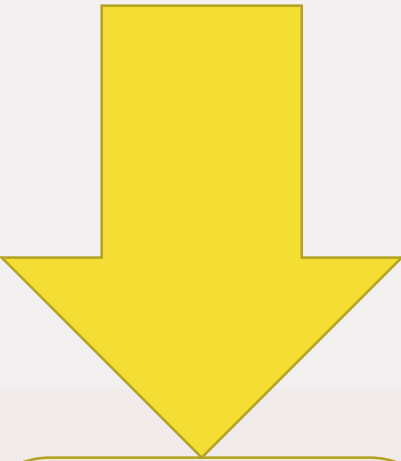
Board Updates

+ Forms & Permits

CalFresh Emergency Allotments Set to End March 2023

**WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED WITH RATES OF MATERIAL
HARDSHIP IN FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?**

WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT MATERIAL HARDSHIP RATES AMONG FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



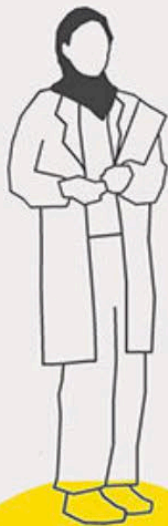
**CHILD
WELL-BEING**



**MATERIAL
HARDSHIP**



CHILDCARE



HEALTHCARE



**PARENT
WELL-BEING**



PAPER | [Full Access](#)

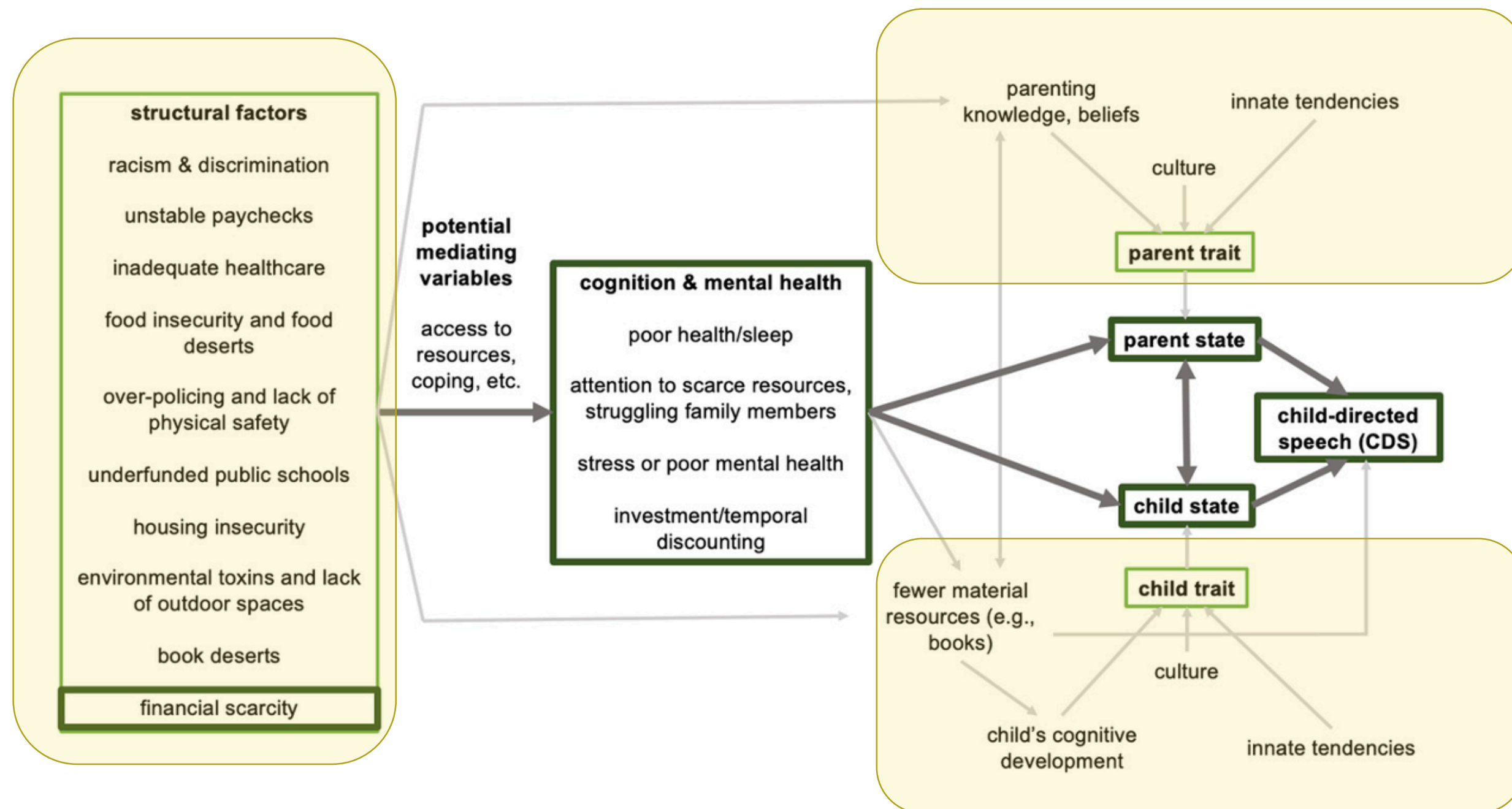
What causes the word gap? Financial concerns may systematically suppress child-directed speech

Monica E. Ellwood-Lowe , Ruthe Foushee, Mahesh Srinivasan

Two pre-registered studies to test whether experiencing financial scarcity can suppress caregivers' speech to their children.

Study 1 suggests that higher-SES caregivers who are prompted to reflect on scarcity—particularly those who reflect on *financial* scarcity—speak less to their 3-year-olds in a subsequent play session, relative to a control group.

Study 2 suggests that mid- to higher-SES caregivers engage in fewer back-and-forth exchanges with their children at the end of the month—when they are more likely to be experiencing financial hardship—than the rest of the month. These studies provide preliminary evidence that—above and beyond caregivers' individual characteristics—structural constraints may affect how much parents speak to their children.



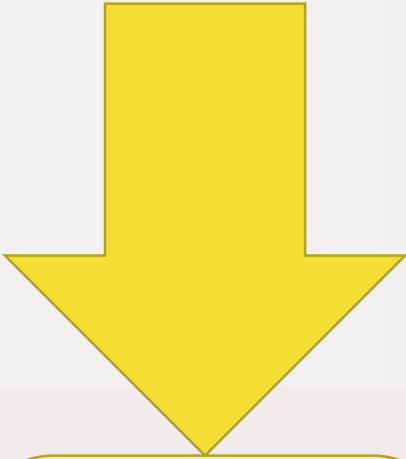
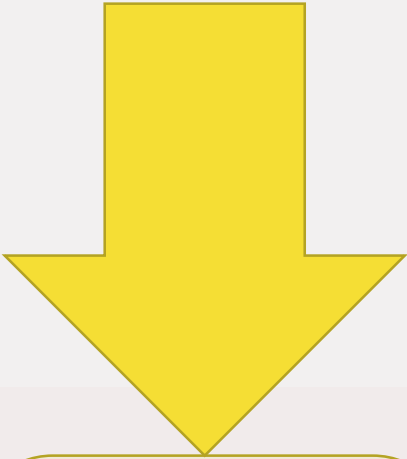
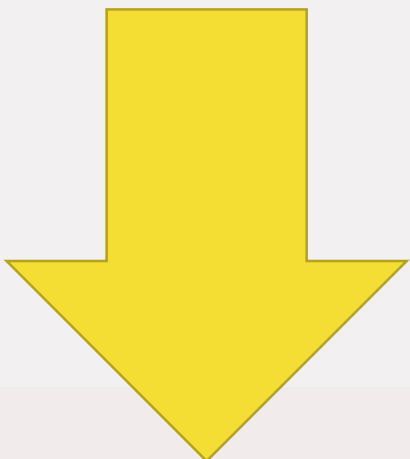
Developmental Science

PAPER | [Full Access](#)

What causes the word gap? Financial concerns may systematically suppress child-directed speech

Monica E. Ellwood-Lowe✉, Ruthe Foushee, Mahesh Srinivasan

WHY ELSE SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT MATERIAL HARDSHIP RATES AMONG FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

A line drawing of a child crawling on all fours.

**CHILD
WELL-BEING**

A line drawing of a woman carrying a shopping bag.

**MATERIAL
HARDSHIP**

A line drawing of a woman pushing a stroller with a child inside.

CHILDCARE

A line drawing of a person in a white lab coat.

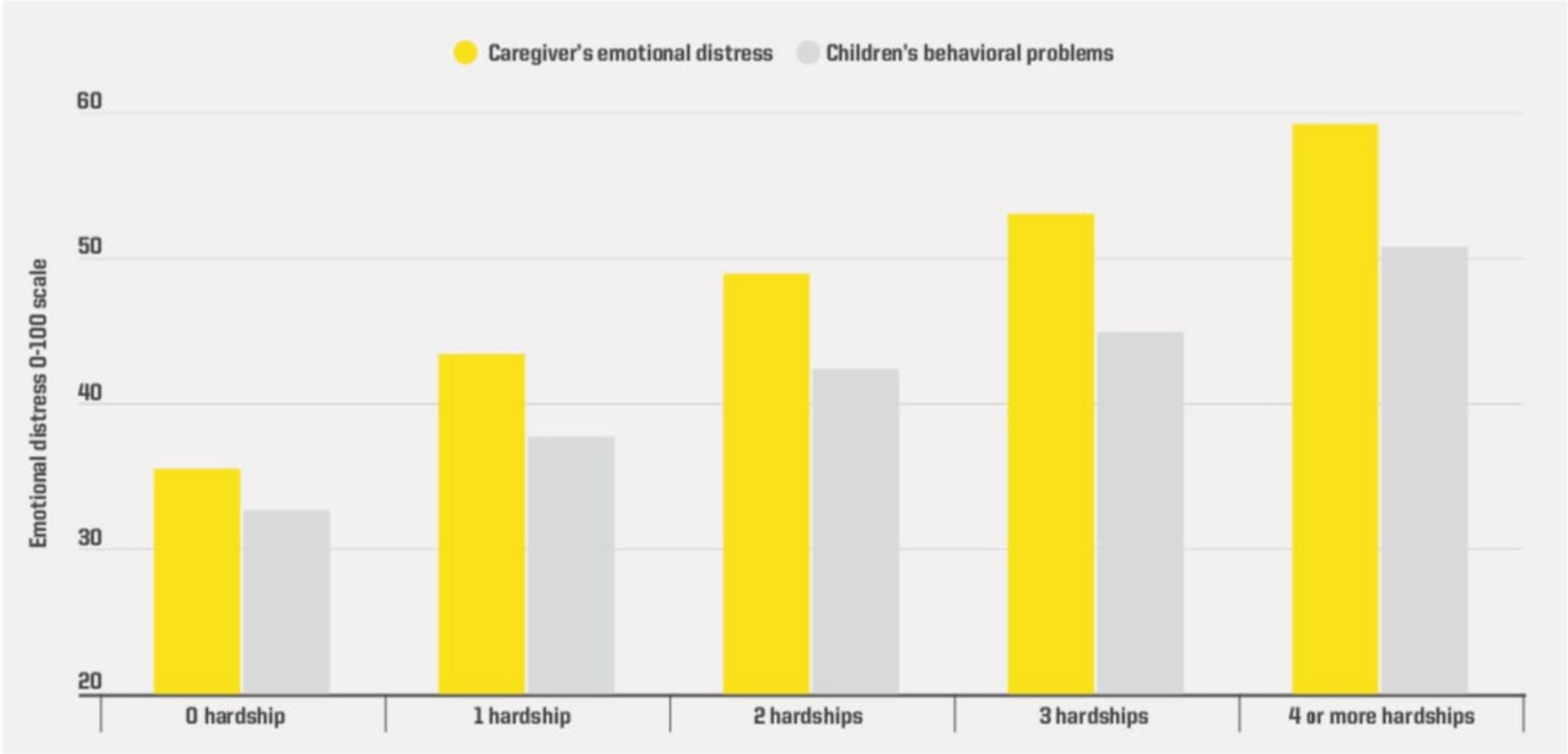
HEALTHCARE

A line drawing of a man standing.

**PARENT
WELL-BEING**

MORE HARDSHIP = MORE DISTRESS

Level of parent/child emotional distress by the number of material hardships



A CHAIN REACTION OF HARDSHIP



MATERIAL HARDSHIP AND *FINANCIAL INSTABILITY* HAVE ADDITIVE EFFECTS ON BOTH ADULT AND CHILD DISTRESS

JULY 2021

ON SHAKY GROUND: UNPREDICTABILITY IN ABILITY TO PAY FOR BASIC NEEDS AFFECTS FAMILY WELL-BEING

Families with young children have been experiencing high levels of material hardship unpredictability, which is affecting parents' and children's socio-emotional experiences and well-being above and beyond the impact of material hardship levels and pre-pandemic household income.

Being able to provide basic needs for one's family consistently week to week is a protective factor for caregivers and their children. When families' financial circumstances are unpredictable, it leads to emotional distress for both parents and children.



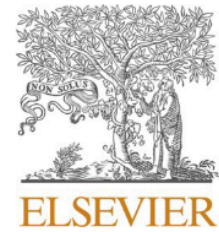
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Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/dcn



Early experience unpredictability in child development as a model for understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: A translational neuroscience perspective

Sihong Liu^{*}, Philip A. Fisher

Center for Translational Neuroscience, Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, United States

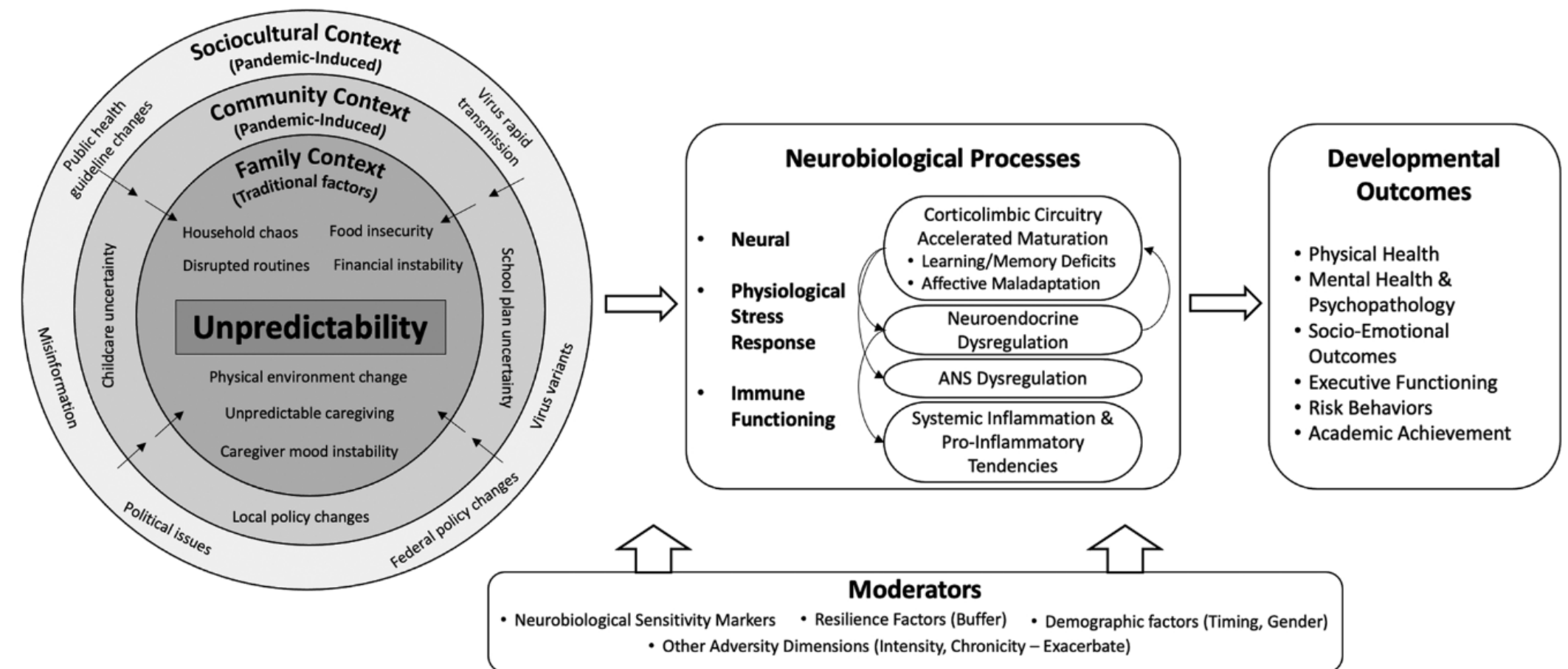
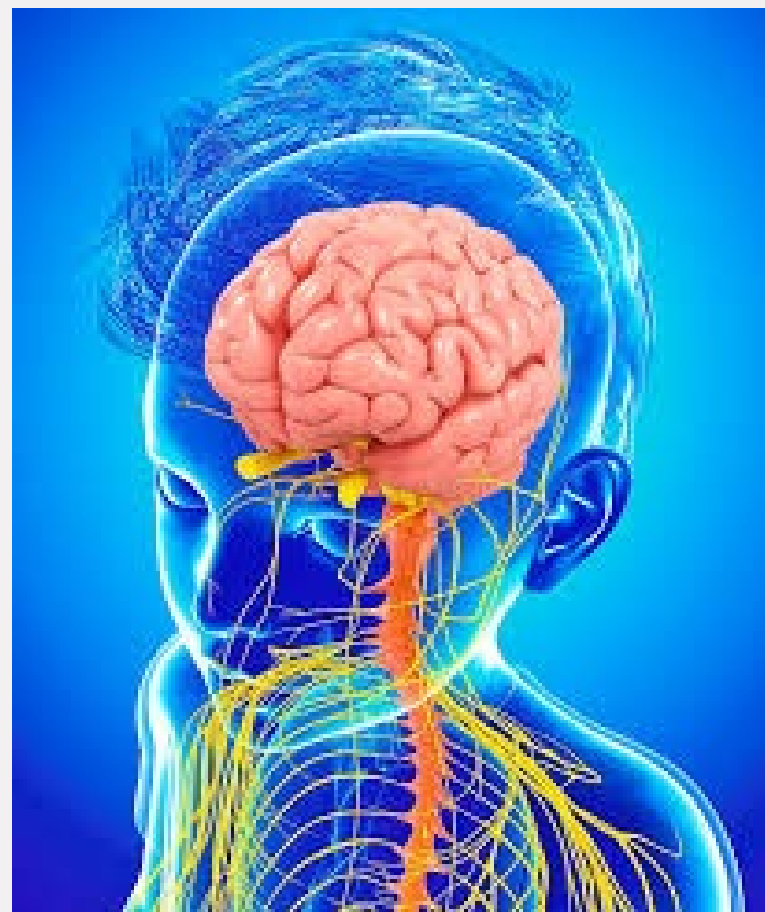


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the impact of unpredictable and adverse early experiences on child development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early life stress and neural development: Implications for understanding the developmental effects of COVID-19

Karen E. Smith[✉] & Seth D. Pollak

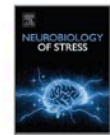
Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience 22, 643–654 (2022) | [Cite this article](#)

Pandemic well-being

During Pandemic
Most Recent Responses



Neurobiology of
Stress
Volume 14, May 2021, 100291



A predictable home environment may protect child mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

Laura M. Glynn^{a,✉}, Elysia Poggi Davis^{b,c}, Joan L. Luby^d, Tallie Z. Baram^{e,f,g}, Curt A. Sandman^c

Neurobiological Processes

- **Neural**
- **Physiological Stress Response**
- **Immune Functioning**

- Corticolimbic Circuitry Accelerated Maturation
- Learning/Memory Deficits
- Affective Maladaptation
- Neuroendocrine Dysregulation
- ANS Dysregulation
- Systemic Inflammation & Pro-Inflammatory Tendencies

Developmental Outcomes

- Physical Health
- Mental Health & Psychopathology
- Socio-Emotional Outcomes
- Executive Functioning
- Risk Behaviors
- Academic Achievement

Moderators

- Neurobiological Sensitivity Markers
- Resilience Factors (Buffer)
- Demographic factors (Timing, Gender)
- Other Adversity Dimensions (Intensity, Chronicity – Exacerbate)

CONCLUSION #2

We should be concerned about high rates of material hardship among families with young children because...

- Bad for parents' well-being
- Bad for kids' well-being (via impact on parents)
- Strong prior evidence from developmental science that environmental factors that disrupt parental social buffering of child stress exposure in the early years impacts brain and biological development, with lifelong implications for health and social emotional development

Unpredictability of material resources further exacerbates things

*Related conclusion, hardship may be a mechanism underlying the word gap observed in lower income households (i.e., interventions targeting language may not be sufficient)

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE DATA TO INFORM FUTURE POLICY?



Alternatives to SNAP: Global Approaches to Addressing Childhood Poverty and Food Insecurity

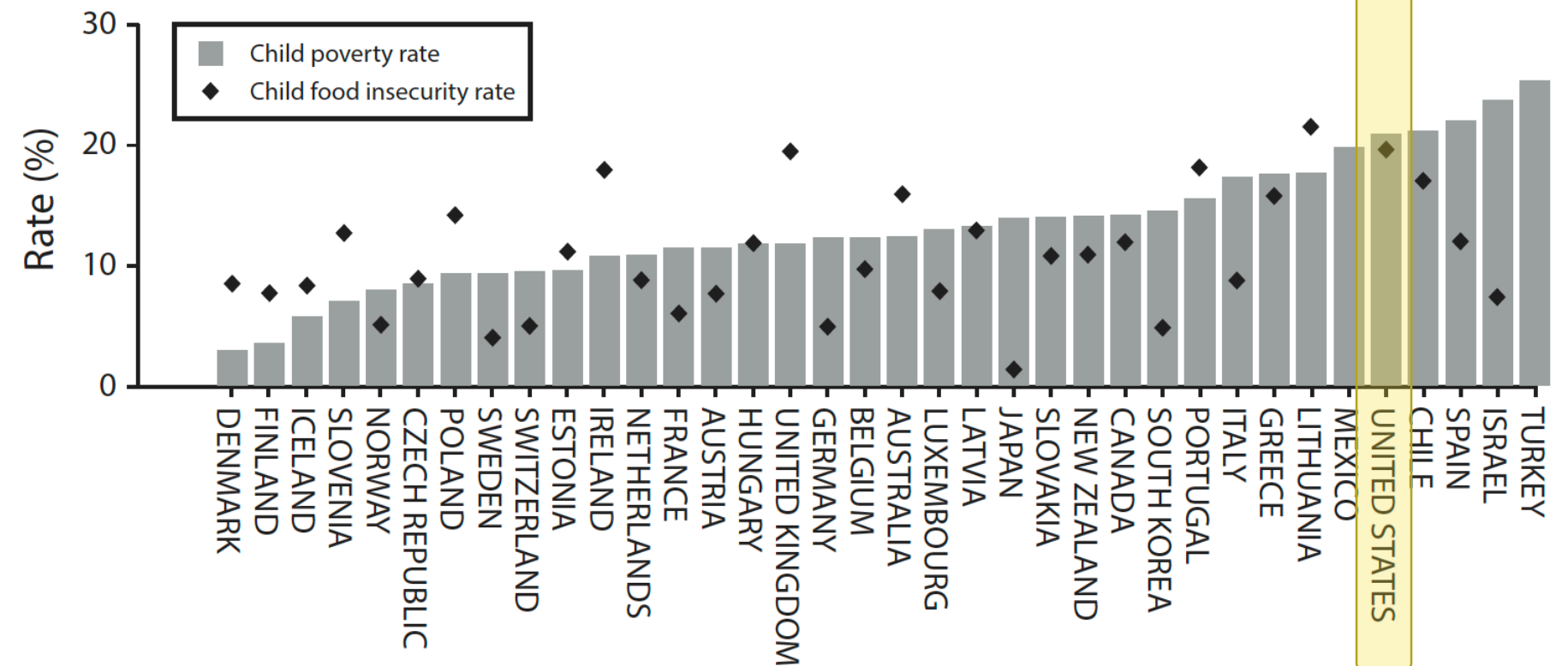
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the United States is a key element of the nation's safety net. More than 42.5 million US

Lia C. H. Fernald, PhD, MBA, and Wendi Gosliner, DrPH, RD



See also Nestle, p. 1631.

- Universal basic income
- Targeted programs
- Conditional cash transfers
- Programs to promote work and earnings



Note. Authors' analysis of data on social spending from the Social Expenditure Database of the OECD. Child poverty data represent country estimates from 2014 to 2016, and food security data represent estimates from 2014 to 2015. For full source information and variable definitions, see Appendix A, available as a supplement to the online version of this article at <http://www.ajph.org>.

FIGURE 1—Child Poverty Rate and Food Insecurity Rate in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Countries

Alternatives to SNAP: Global Approaches to Addressing Childhood Poverty and Food Insecurity

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the United States is a key element of the nation's safety net, with 42.5 million US

Lia C. H. Fernald, PhD, MBA, and Wendi Gosliner, DrPH, RD



See also Nestle, p. 1631.

Recommendations based on evidence from other countries:

- Increase SNAP and EITC benefits
- Establish additional benefits to support low-income families with young children
- Implement a universal child allowance
- Follow the examples of other high-income countries and increase US investments in families with children, particularly low-income families, including SNAP as well as support for tax credits, housing, and education.

CASH PLUS...?

1

Use and extend
RAPID as a child and
family centered co-
design tool

2

Use systems minded
approaches to
develop solutions

3

Focus on place-based
(community-level)
solutions

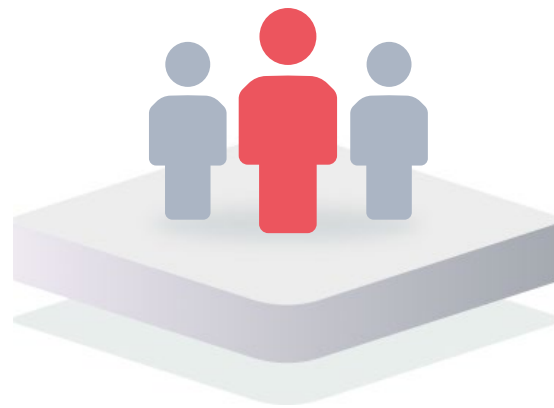
4

Pre-RCT use rapid-
cycle evaluation to
determine whether
targeted mechanisms
are being impacted

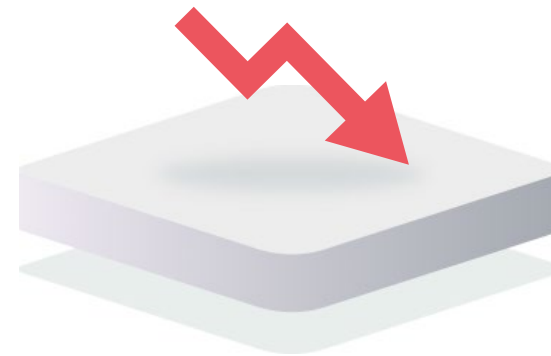
5

Identify moderators
and use adaptive
designs to develop
precision approaches

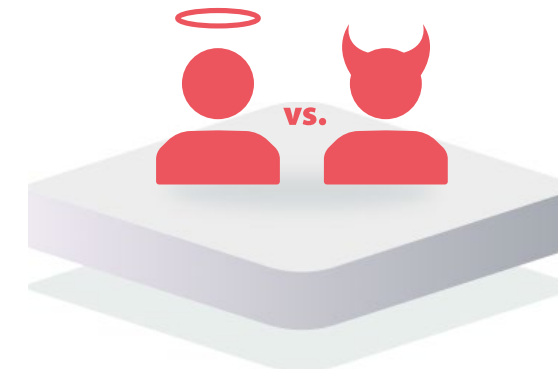
AN ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: FRAMEWORKS' RESEARCH ON CULTURAL MINDSETS



Individualism
Individualism

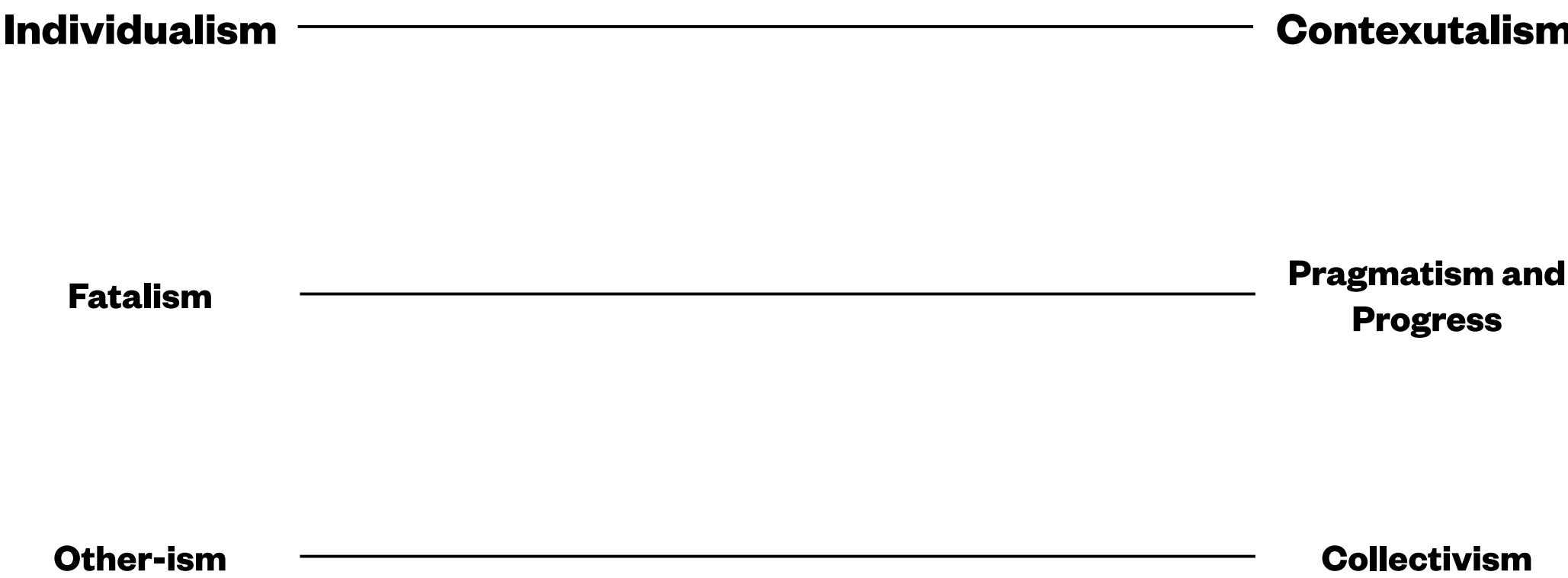


Fatalism
Fatalism



Other-ism
Tribalism

CULTURAL MINDSETS ON SPECIFIC ISSUES (INCLUDING CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING) VARY ALONG THESE DIMENSIONS

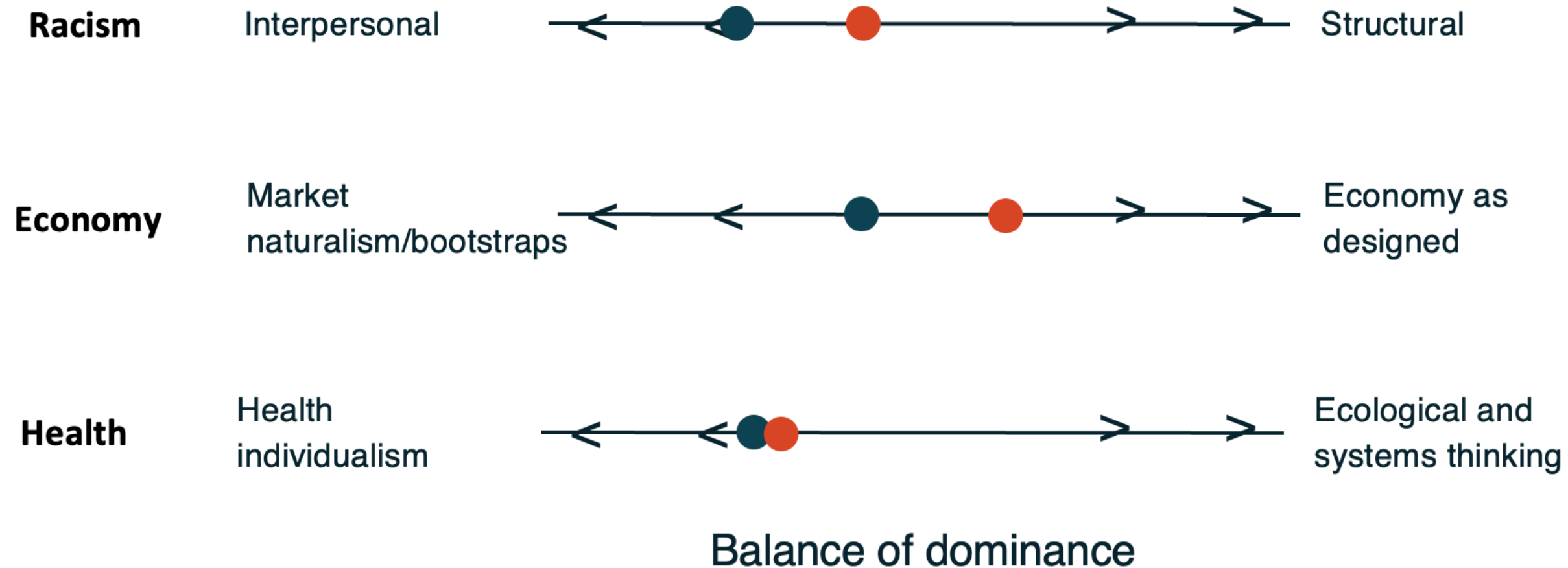


1 big trend

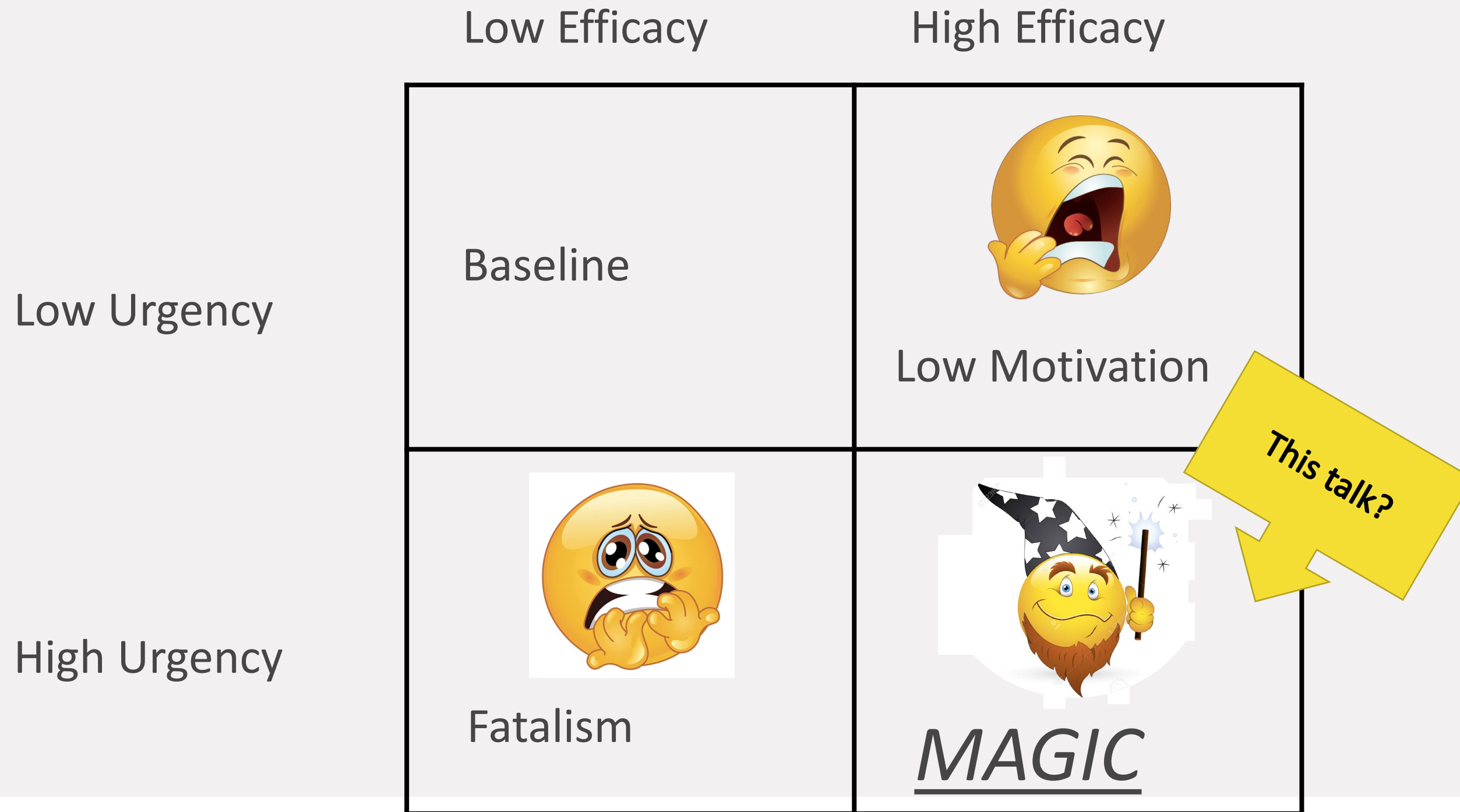
systems thinking/individualism
balance is in flux

Systems thinking is on the rise...
but unevenly

Different issues, differing dominance



How we communicate about issues can impact cultural mindsets



CONCLUSION #3

Culture *IS* volatile and changing

Changes present space to think in new ways about solutions

How we communicate about issues like early childhood poverty has potential to impact cultural mindsets for better or worse

But, taken together, understanding how to evidence-based family economic policies plus new approaches to designing and evaluating other supports together show great promise for impacting population-level outcomes

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- Child Care Aware of America
- Home Grown
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- National Association for Family Child Care
- National Workforce Registry Alliance
- ParentsTogether
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