

# Employment and Food in Maryland during the first four months of the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Introduction

This brief describes the experiences and perspectives of food insecurity specifically for Maryland residents who experienced job disruption during the first four months of the pandemic, and their households. Job disruption includes being furloughed, having a loss of hours or income, or losing their job. Many disparities were exacerbated during the pandemic, and the disparities between households with and without job disruption will be discussed here. We gathered insights regarding food insecurity from 903 households using the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) 6-item tool, in which respondents who say “yes” to two or more of the six questions are categorized as experiencing food insecurity. In this brief, households are grouped into three categories:

- **Households with food security** at the time of the survey, regardless of prior food insecurity status;
- **Households with persistent food insecurity**, both in the year before and since the pandemic began;
- **Households with new food insecurity**, classified as food secure in the year before the pandemic, but having food insecurity after the pandemic’s start.

See “Approach” section for further background details.

## Key Findings

1. Those with job disruption were 3 times more likely to experience food insecurity than those without job disruption.
2. Half of those who experienced job loss had children in their household.
3. Support for the cost of food delivery was reported as a much more helpful strategy to improve food insecurity in those with job loss compared to those with no job impact.

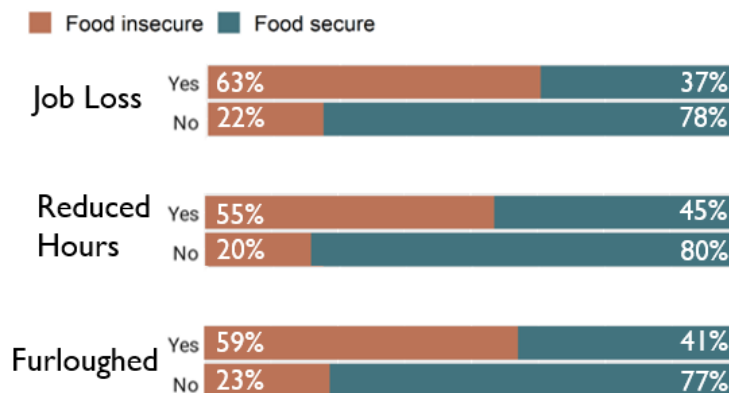
## Changes in employment status for Marylander households

- During the first four months of the pandemic, 18% of those who responded to the survey reported job loss, 25% reported reduced hours or income, and 15% were furloughed (Table 1).
- Half of those who experienced job loss had children in their household.
- Notably, Southern Maryland\* had the highest report of job loss and the highest prevalence of food insecurity in households with children compared to other regions.

**Table 1.** Prevalence of job disruption in the first 4 months of the pandemic

Job Loss	Reduced hours/ income	Furloughed
18%	25%	15%

**Figure 1.** Proportion of households experiencing food insecurity in those with and without job disruption during the first four months of the pandemic



\*Southern Maryland includes Montgomery, Prince George’s, Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary’s Counties. Source: Maryland Department of Health

## Job loss linked to decreased food security and access during the first four months of the pandemic

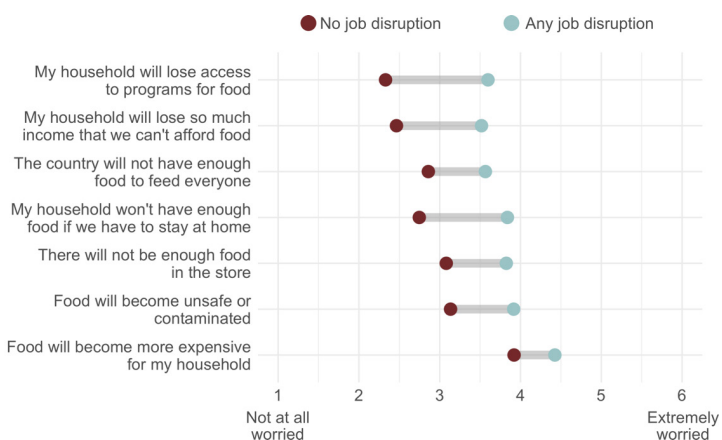
- Compared to respondents who did not have changes in employment, those with job loss or disruption were about 3 times more likely to experience food insecurity.
- Over half of all households with some form of job disruption were classified as food insecure during the first four months of the pandemic (Figure 1)

## Job disruption linked to worries about food

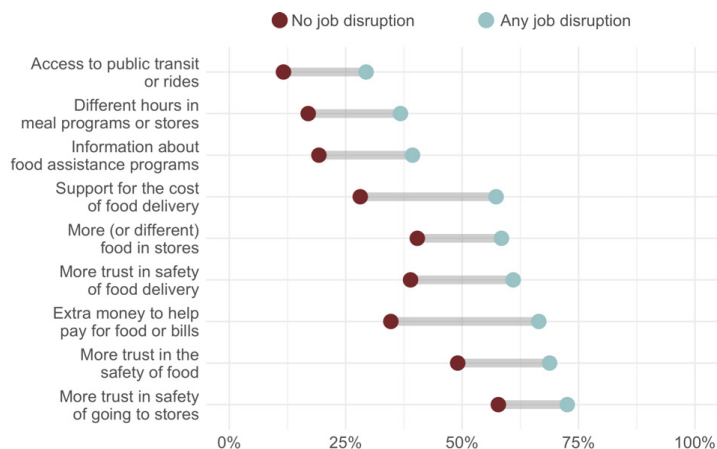
We asked respondents about their level of concern related to food and what strategies would be helpful to meet their food needs. Respondents who experienced job disruption during the pandemic had greater food access concerns and more interest in receiving support than respondents with no job impact.

- Compared to respondents with no job disruption, those with job loss were much more likely to express anxiety and concern over a number of issues related to food, including quantity, cost, and safety of food (Figure 2).
- Over 25% of respondents with job disruption said they were interested in more access to public transit, more/different hours for food assistance programs or stores, and information about food assistance programs. Less than 20% of respondents with no job disruption reported interest in these supports.
- Most respondents sought more trust in safety of going to stores. Compared to those without job disruption, those whose jobs were impacted reported much higher interest in support for cost of food delivery and more trust in food delivery (Figure 3).

**Figure 2.** Average level of concern related to food and coronavirus by job disruption status during the first four months of the pandemic



**Figure 3.** Proportion of households by job disruption status interested in supports to help meet their food needs during the COVID-19 pandemic



## Approach

We surveyed 1,045 adults living in Maryland in July/August 2020 using a Qualtrics online panel. 142 households were excluded due to incorrect zip codes or missing information on food insecurity. Survey participants reflect the Maryland adult population by race. We oversampled those with lower incomes to support further insights, then adjusted so that analyses reflect the national income, race and ethnicity distribution in 2019. Limitations of surveys like this one may include underrepresentation of groups including: those with low literacy or unable to take survey in English/Spanish, without cell phone or Internet, those facing high pandemic demands, and those with low trust of surveys. Additionally, responses may be influenced by factors such as aspiration, social desirability, misunderstanding, or rushing to complete.

## Funding Statement

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## About NFACT

This research is conducted as part of The National Food Access and COVID research Team (NFACT), which is implementing common measurements and tools across study sites in the US. NFACT is a national collaboration of researchers committed to rigorous, comparative, and timely food access research during the time of COVID. We do this through collaborative, open access research that prioritizes communication to key decision-makers while building our scientific understanding of food system behaviors and policies. A series of summary briefs of this survey are available at [www.nfactresearch.org](http://www.nfactresearch.org) to learn more.