

Research Finds Black and Hispanic Families Demonstrated Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic Despite Experiencing More Stressors; White Families Reported More Feelings of Distress

WILMINGTON, Del. (Dec. 14, 2023) — Research published in the [*Journal of Pediatric Psychology*](#) and conducted by Nemours Children's Health researchers reported that non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic families experienced more exposure to the COVID-19 virus and its economic consequences in the first year of the pandemic, while non-Hispanic white families were more likely to report distress.

"The COVID-19 pandemic called attention to, and exacerbated, sociodemographic inequities within the United States," said the study's senior author, Paul Enlow, PhD, Pediatric Psychologist and Research Scientist at the Nemours Center for Healthcare Delivery Science, Nemours Children's Health, Delaware Valley. "We wanted to understand how the pandemic differentially impacted how families functioned."

A total of 1,581 caregivers of children receiving care at Nemours Children's Health, Delaware Valley completed an electronic survey developed by the team, the COVID-19 Exposure and Family Impact Scales (CEFIS), at two timepoints: October/November 2020 and March/April 2021. The CEFIS measures the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on families in three ways: Exposure, Impact and Distress. Exposure encompassed 25 potential pandemic-related stressors including decreased family income, hospitalization of a family member and difficulty getting food. Impact measured the perceived impact of the pandemic on a family's well-being, including elements like sleep, mood and family interactions. Distress measured children's and caregivers' perceptions of distress within the family.

Caregivers reported being exposed to an average of eight pandemic-related stressors in the first six months of the pandemic and nine by 12 months into the pandemic, with Black and Hispanic caregivers reporting an average of one more pandemic-related stressor than white caregivers. Black and Hispanic caregivers were more likely to report COVID-19 illness or a death in the family, economic stressors and difficulty obtaining food, medicine or healthcare.

Despite experiencing fewer stressors, white families were more likely than Black and Hispanic families to say that the pandemic had a negative impact on family interactions and aspects of personal well-being, including eating, sleeping, anxiety and mood.

Brenda Romagnoli, PsyD, a postdoctoral research fellow at Nemours and the first author on this paper, said the relatively lower impact and distress scores for Black and Hispanic families may indicate resiliency in communities of color from strategies that have developed historically in the face of racial injustice or cultural values of these communities. "By potentially having implemented these strategies in their daily lives, communities of color may have been more resilient during the pandemic relative to white families," Romagnoli said.

The distinct ways racial and ethnic groups responded to the pandemic are worthy of further study, with a focus on understanding protective factors, Romagnoli said. She added that the study supports "strengths-based" approaches to mental health and family wellness, in which practitioners praise positive behaviors and use them as models for other families.

"A healthy family will still experience distress during a major event like the pandemic. Our goal should be identifying healthy ways to cope with this distress," Enlow said. "What we know from other studies is that sticking to routines as much as possible, talking about and validating feelings, and leveraging social supports can help families cope more effectively with stressful life events."

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About Nemours Children's Health

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, which includes two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of more than 70 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours Children's also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, [Nemours KidsHealth.org](https://www.NemoursKidsHealth.org).

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves. For more information, visit [Nemours.org](https://nemours.org).

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