



Black Parents and Their Babies: The Dual Pandemic of Racism and COVID-19, 2019–2022

October 2022



Equity Research Action Coalition

UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

About the Equity Research Action Coalition at the UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

The Equity Research Action Coalition, a university-based collaborative, focuses on co-constructing with practitioners and policymakers actionable research and evaluation to support the optimal development of Black children prenatally through childhood across the African diaspora. The Coalition works at the intersection of research, program, and practice through anti-racist and cultural wealth frameworks. The Coalition focuses on developing a science-based action framework to eradicate the impact of racism and poverty and all its consequences on the lives of Black children, families, and communities, and to ensure their optimal health and well-being.

Acknowledgments: We want to thank Phil Fisher and the RAPID-EC team at Stanford University. We want to also thank the families that have participated in the RAPID-EC to help generate information for policy actions. The Equity Research Action Coalition stands on the shoulders of many and is grateful for this support in service of equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Finally, we thank the Pritzker Children's Initiative for its continued support of the Black Babies Equity Project, including support for the production and dissemination of this report.

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INTRODUCTION

This report draws on data from the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development-Early Childhood (RAPID-EC) survey to present key findings and recommendations about the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on 782 Black and Black/multiracial families with babies (i.e., infants and toddlers, birth to age 3) in the United States. The RAPID-EC is an early childhood family well-being survey designed to gather essential information in a continuous manner regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being

of children and their families during the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. RAPID-EC has partnered with researchers and institutions across the country including the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Data for this report were collected by the RAPID-EC team at Stanford University (formerly at the University of Oregon) between April 2020 and February 2022.

We use the term “Black” as a pan-ethnic description of anyone having any ancestral heritage from Africa. This includes individuals who identify as African American—those who were primarily born in America and are descendants of enslaved Africans—as well as those living in America who identify as Black African or Afro-Caribbean. “Black” also includes those who reported being Black alone or in combination with one or more races or ethnicities in their responses to the U.S. Census, such as Afro-Latine.

The first 1,000 days are foundational for healthy development.

The first years of life set the foundation not only for children’s healthy development but also for their school and life success. Early adversity can shift critical time periods of brain and healthy development. Access to basic resources may reduce families’ experiences of chronic stress and also ensure children receive access to nutritional, psychosocial, and health care necessary for healthy development. Unfortunately, systemic racism and interpersonal experiences of discrimination create undue influence on the health and well-being of both children and adults in multiple and complex ways.

The primary focus of this report is Black families with babies.

This report includes information about the full sample of 9,991 RAPID-EC families with babies to provide broader context for the experiences of Black families. Throughout this report we use the terms “babies,” “infants,” “toddlers,” and “young children” interchangeably, but also recognize there are varying developmental stages and milestones for each. A majority of families in the full RAPID-EC sample identify as White (72%), with smaller proportions of Black (8%), multiracial (5%), Asian (5%), and American Indian/ Alaska Native (3%) families. Six percent of families identify as an “other” racial group. Eight percent of the sample identify as first-generation immigrants, born outside of the U.S., and approximately 16% are Latine.ⁱ Nearly all families (96%) report English as their primary language. Survey participants report an average household income of \$91,417, which is significantly higher than the U.S. median household income of \$67,521 for the year 2020.ⁱⁱ

Black families in this sample report an average household income of \$56,723, much higher than the 2020 median household income of \$45,870 for Black families in the U.S.ⁱⁱⁱ Nearly all Black families (98%) in the sample report English as their primary language. Seven percent identify as first-generation immigrants born outside of the U.S., and 11% identify as Latine.

Analyses examined Black families by income level.

We performed descriptive analyses of the RAPID-EC data with special attention to Black families with babies. Previous analyses indicate that families with low incomes were more likely to feel the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, we examined the data by families' income level. Specifically, we identified whether families were below/near poverty (families with incomes that were less than 200% of the federal poverty threshold) or middle-income (families with incomes that were above 200% of the federal poverty threshold). These comparisons allowed us to determine if differential experiences during the pandemic exist based on family income level.¹

This report is centered on the 3Ps Framework: Protecting, Promoting, and Preserving.

This report is organized through the lens of protecting, promoting, and preserving the well-being of Black families and babies. Specifically, for "Protecting," we explore Black families' experiences with racism, discrimination, and material hardship. With "Promoting," we cross-examine Black families' economic security, health, and access to early learning opportunities. Under "Preserving," we survey Black families' maintenance of cultural identity.



¹ Not all findings are reported by income level.

Findings

This report demonstrates that two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Black families and their babies are surviving, although they continue to feel the weight of racism, discrimination, economic strain, and other inequities, compounded by the global pandemic. Racism and discrimination remain a concern for Black families and their babies, along with economic instability and addressing mental health challenges. Our key findings indicate that:

- Psychological trauma continues to afflict Black families and their babies two years into the pandemic.
- Black families' economic security improved slightly during the second year of the pandemic but continues to be tenuous.
- Black families continue to prioritize their health and the well-being of their children during the pandemic, although COVID-19 remains a threat.



Recommendations

Black families continue to disproportionately feel the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by systemic racism. National, state, and local leaders and policies must continue to attend to the unique needs of Black families and babies to properly recover from the devastating impact of this global pandemic. Multi-sectoral and cross-agency collaborations rooted in anti-racist frameworks, policies, and strategies are critical. Based on the findings of this report, we call for these immediate prioritized actions:

- Protect Black babies and their families from racism, discrimination, and material hardship.
- Promote economic security, along with mobility and access to high-quality and affirming health care and early learning environments, for Black families and their babies to ensure their well-being.
- Preserve Black children's cultural identity and positive sense of self, a necessary developmental outcome, despite the continued racial stress and trauma present in their daily lives due to ongoing discrimination and biases.

Black Parents and Their Babies: The Dual Pandemic of Racism and COVID-19, 2019–2022



Science has confirmed the importance of the first 1,000 days of children’s lives and the importance of supporting the health and economic stability of parents and families to meet the needs of children.^{iv} Attention to the first 1,000 days of children’s lives is particularly critical for Black children and their families, who are placed at risk due to structural and systemic racism, which has resulted—and continues to result—in inequities that limit their ability to fully lean into the American dream.

As follow-up to the Equity Research Action Coalition’s **2021 report**^v showing that Black families are disproportionately experiencing the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is compounded by structural and systemic racism, this report examines how Black families with babies are coping two years into the global pandemic, using the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development-Early Childhood study (RAPID-EC).

This project is funded by the Pritzker Children’s Initiative and led by the Equity Research Action Coalition (the Equity Coalition) at the UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. The Equity Coalition is a university-based research-practice-policy think tank centered on creating equitable opportunities for Black children and their families and educators.



There are 11.4 million Black babies in the U.S. Over 60% of Black babies live in families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level, which is more than double the rate for White babies (29%).^{vi} Black families and babies experience multiple adversities prior to and after birth.^{vii} At the same time, there is a growing understanding of the cultural wealth that Black families use to navigate structural racism and other racialized experiences.^{viii} To understand the racialized experiences and assets of Black families, Iruka and colleagues (2021)^{ix} call upon the importance of centering the 3Ps—protecting, promoting, and preserving—to support the health and social and economic well-being of Black families and babies by attending to their cognitive, socio-emotional, and cultural competencies.^x

Using the 3Ps framework, this updated report examines the extent to which society as a whole:

- protects Black families and babies from racism, discrimination, and material hardship,
- promotes Black families' and babies' economic security, health, and access to early learning opportunities, and
- preserves Black families' and babies' cultural identity.



Protecting Black babies and their families from racism, discrimination, and material hardship

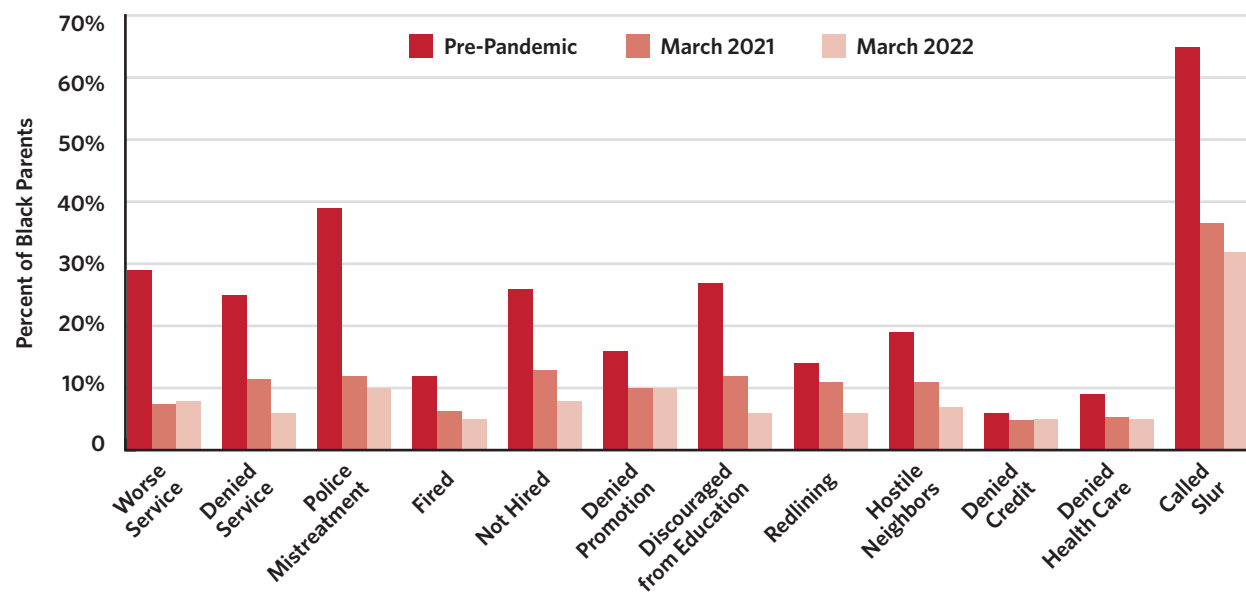
RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

One out of three Black parents reported the use of a slur directed at them during the pandemic; this rate decreased slightly between 2021 and 2022. Black parents also reported concerns about unfair treatment of their children, particularly prior to the pandemic.

Black parents of babies reported the use of a derogatory name/racial slur directed toward them as the most common form of discrimination. Sixty-five percent of Black parents experienced a racial slur prior to the pandemic, compared with 37% and 32% in March 2021 and 2022, respectively (see Figure 1). Black parents rated police mistreatment as the second most common form of discrimination. Thirty-nine percent of Black parents reported mistreatment experiences prior to the pandemic. This proportion dropped to 12% during the first year of the pandemic and 10% during the second year of the pandemic. A small proportion of Black parents reported experiences with all forms of discrimination during the pandemic (compared to the pre-pandemic period); this proportion fell slightly at year two (compared to year one).



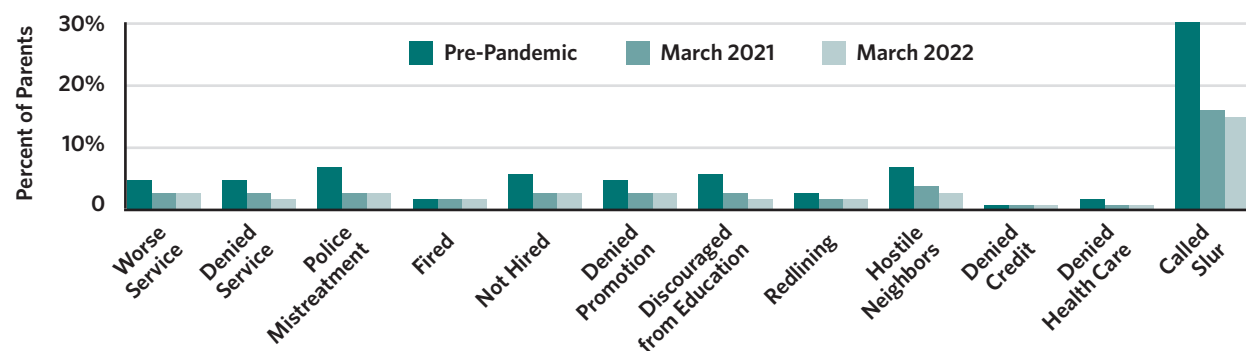
Figure 1. Black Parents of Babies: Experiences of Discrimination



Note. Pre-Pandemic N = 265; March 2021 N = 235; March 2022 N = 191. RAPID-EC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and February 16, 2022

Parents of babies in the full RAPID-EC sample were less likely to experience discrimination than Black parents of babies (see Figure 2). Across all survey timepoints, Black parents were two-to-six times more likely to experience all forms of discrimination than parents in the full sample.

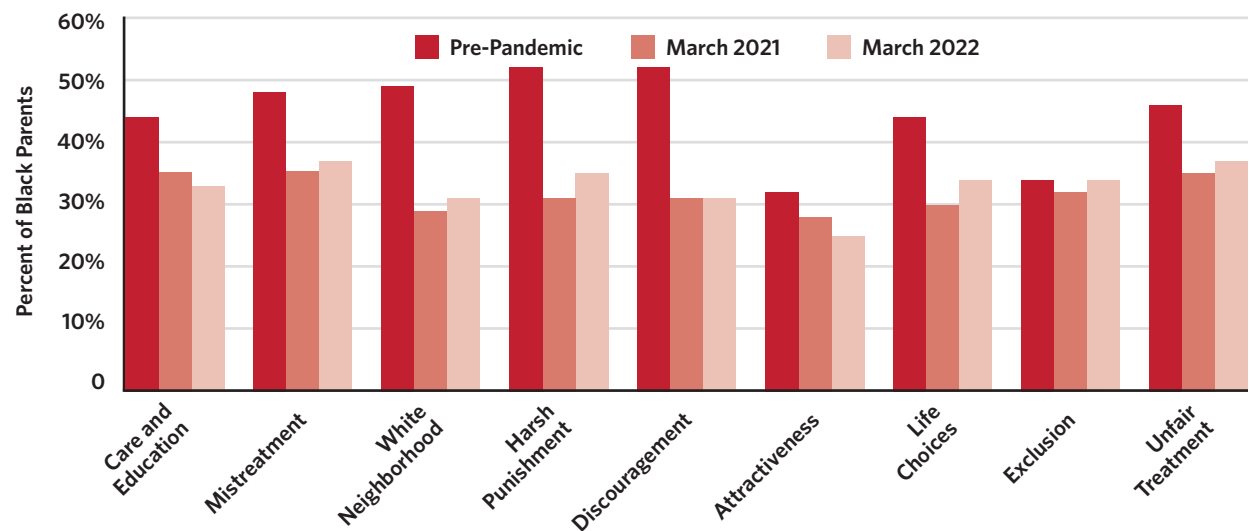
Figure 2. All Parents of Babies: Experiences of Discrimination



Note. Pre-Pandemic N = 4,188; March 2021 N = 3,124; March 2022 N = 3,326. RAPID-EC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Both prior to and during the pandemic, Black parents of babies expressed concerns about their children's experiences due to the race of their child (see Figure 3). Discouragement from trying new things, unfair treatment, and harsh punishment were the most commonly reported concerns. Prior to the pandemic, Black parents were more than twice as likely to report concerns about harsher punishment for their child compared to the full RAPID-EC sample. Across all areas of concern, smaller proportions of Black parents voiced concerns during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period. The most extreme reduction occurred in the first year of the pandemic. During the second year of the pandemic (March 2022), the rate of reporting remained stable or increased slightly (compared to March 2021).

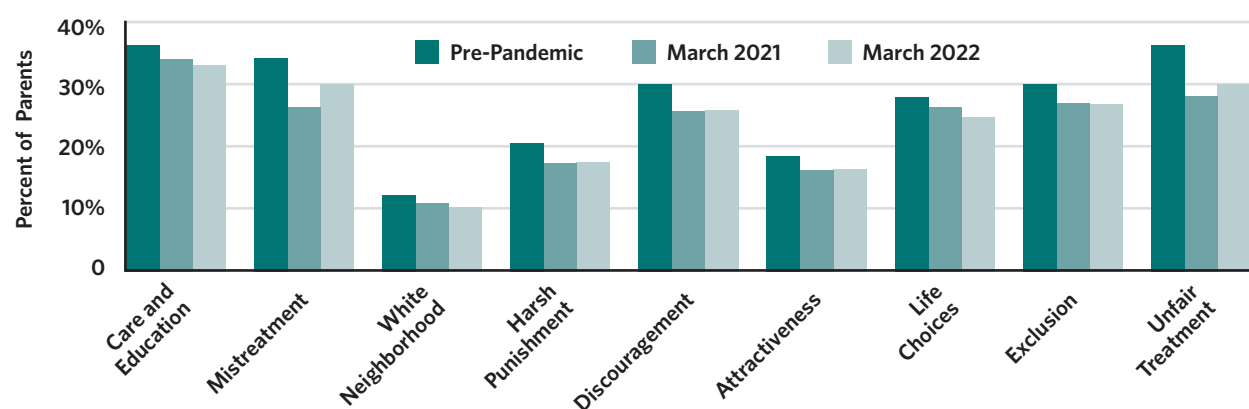
Figure 3. Black Parents of Babies: Concern for Children



Note. Pre-Pandemic N = 265; March 2021 N = 235; March 2022 N = 191. RAPID-EC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Parents in the full sample reported a similar (generally downward) trend in their concerns between pre-pandemic levels and the levels conveyed in March 2021 and March 2022. Fewer parents in the full sample reported concerns for their children due to their race (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. All Parents of Babies: Concern for Children



Note. Pre-Pandemic N = 4,188; March 2021 N = 3,124; March 2022 N = 3,326. RAPID-EC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

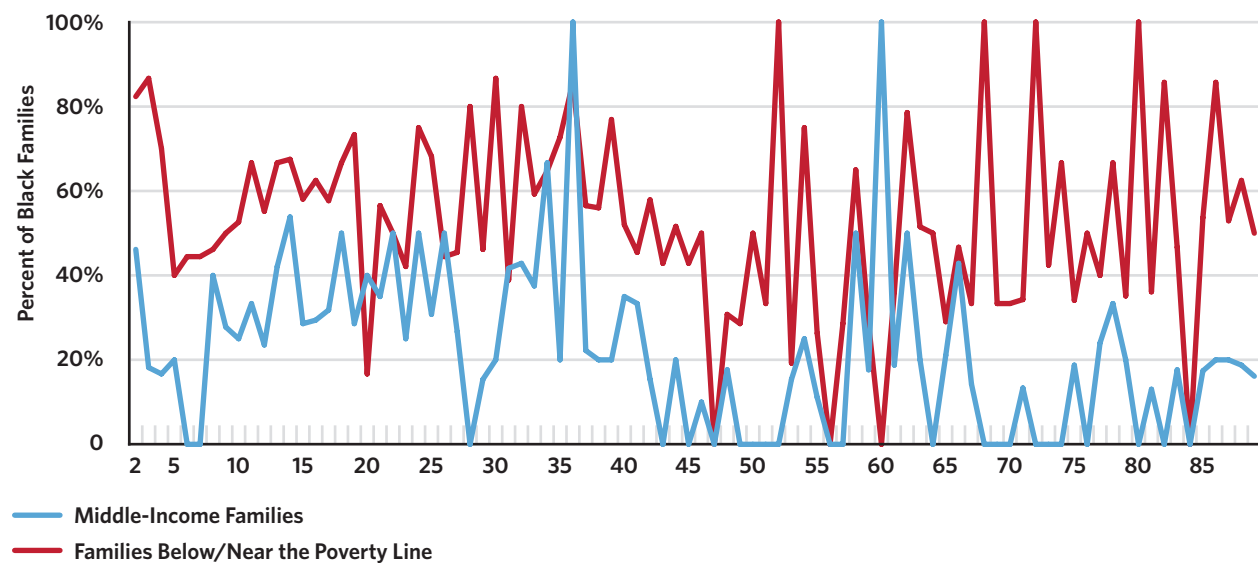
MATERIAL HARDSHIP

Black families experienced volatility in material hardships (e.g., food, shelter, health care, child care) over the course of the pandemic. While middle-income Black families reported a reduction in material hardship between 2021 and 2022, Black families living below or near the poverty line did not experience a similar reduction. The percentage of Black families living below or near the poverty line who reported difficulty with utilities, housing, health care, and reduced access to free food increased between 2021 and 2022. The vast majority of these families also receive public benefits.

Black parents reported their experience with material hardships, such as difficulty paying for basic needs like housing, electricity and water, food, early care and education, and health care. By March 2022, the proportion of families that experienced material hardship had declined (50% among families living below or near the poverty line; 16% among middle-income families) compared to the proportion at the start of the survey (82% among families living below or near the poverty line; 46% among middle-income families). In spite of the decline, a volatile trend persisted across all survey periods. Indeed, even middle-income Black families reported experiences with material hardships for several weeks at a time.



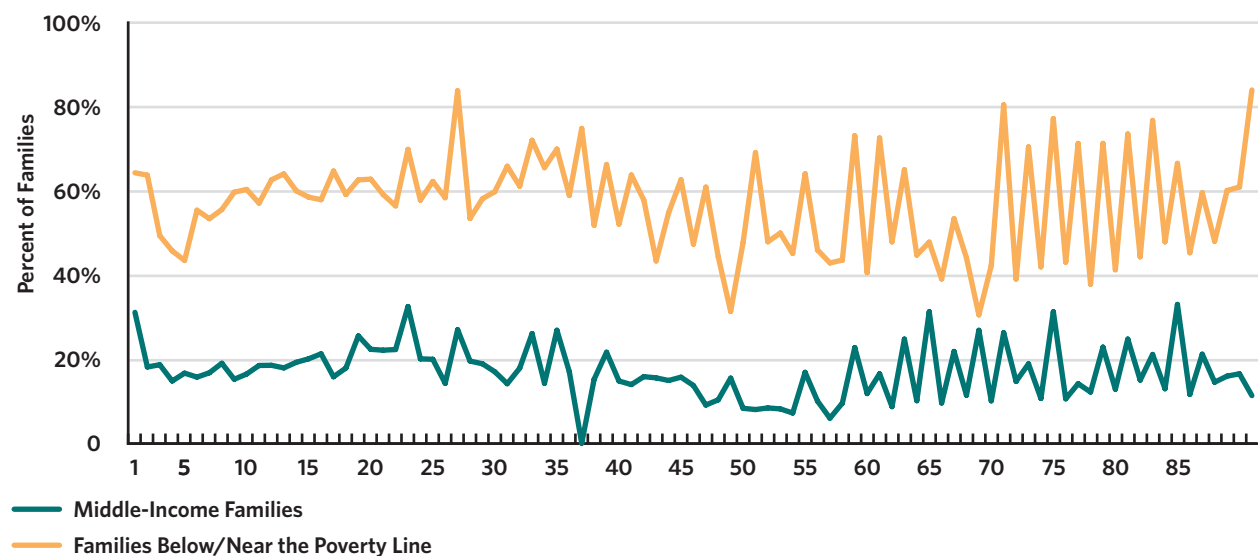
Figure 5. Black Families with Babies Reporting One or More Material Hardships



Note. N = 782. RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Families with babies in the full RAPID-EC sample experienced less volatility related to material hardships (see Figure 6) throughout the pandemic compared to Black families. Among middle-income families, 31% reported experiencing material hardships at the start of the survey, which decreased to 11% by March 2022.

Figure 6. All Families with Babies Reporting One or More Material Hardships



Note. N = 9,991. RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

One in three Black families living below or near the poverty line reported difficulties paying for basic needs (see Table 1) during year one of the pandemic. This proportion dropped notably by March 2022, but one in four of these families still reported difficulty with material hardships. The declines were more pronounced for Black families living below or near the poverty line than for middle-income Black families.

Table 1. Black Families' Material Hardships

	2021		2022		Change from 2021-2022		% Change from 2021-2022	
	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income
Difficulties Paying for Basic Needs (Hard/Very Hard)	32.29%	7.65%	26.64%	7.02%	-5.65%	-0.63%	-17.50%	-8.24%
Difficulty Paying for:								
Utilities	45.34%	20.77%	47.25%	13.68%	1.91%	-7.09%	4.21%	-34.14%
Housing	34.46%	17.49%	35.32%	11.11%	0.86%	-6.38%	2.50%	-36.48%
Food	30.32%	16.94%	24.77%	11.97%	-5.55%	-4.97%	-18.30%	-29.34%
Early Care and Education	18.13%	13.67%	14.68%	9.40%	-3.45%	-4.27%	-19.03%	-31.24%
Health Care	10.88%	11.48%	11.92%	4.27%	1.04%	-7.21%	9.56%	-62.80%
Material Hardships (3 or More)	29.02%	16.39%	25.23%	12.82%	-3.79%	-3.57%	-13.06%	-21.78%
Receiving Public Benefits	53.91%	18.58%	59.07%	13.79%	5.16%	-4.79%	9.57%	-25.78%
Access to Free Food	48.96%	22.95%	22.48%	3.42%	-26.48%	-19.53%	-54.08%	-85.10%

Note. N = 782; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Table 2. All Families' Material Hardships

	2021		2022		Change from 2021-2022		% Change from 2021-2022	
	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income
Difficulties Paying for Basic Needs (Hard/Very Hard)	29.22%	5.99%	24.17%	3.91%	-5.05%	-2.08%	-17.28%	-34.72%
Difficulty Paying for:								
Utilities	45.53%	11.31%	38.18%	7.39%	-7.35%	-3.92%	-16.14%	-34.66%
Housing	35.39%	10.04%	29.70%	6.34%	-5.69%	-3.70%	-16.08%	-36.85%
Food	30.60%	9.47%	25.69%	6.84%	-4.91%	-2.63%	-16.05%	-27.77%
Early Care and Education	12.68%	6.57%	13.82%	6.95%	1.14%	0.38%	8.99%	5.78%
Health Care	13.07%	7.75%	12.53%	6.58%	-0.54%	-1.17%	-4.13%	-15.10%
Material Hardships (3 or More)	29.09%	8.84%	24.31%	6.94%	-4.78%	-1.90%	-16.43%	-21.49%
Receiving Public Benefits	48.33%	9.40%	52.56%	7.07%	4.23%	-2.33%	8.75%	-24.75%
Access to Free Food	44.61%	13.63%	12.58%	2.44%	-32.03%	-11.19%	-71.80%	-82.10%

Note. N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Promoting economic security, health, and access to early learning opportunities for Black babies and their families

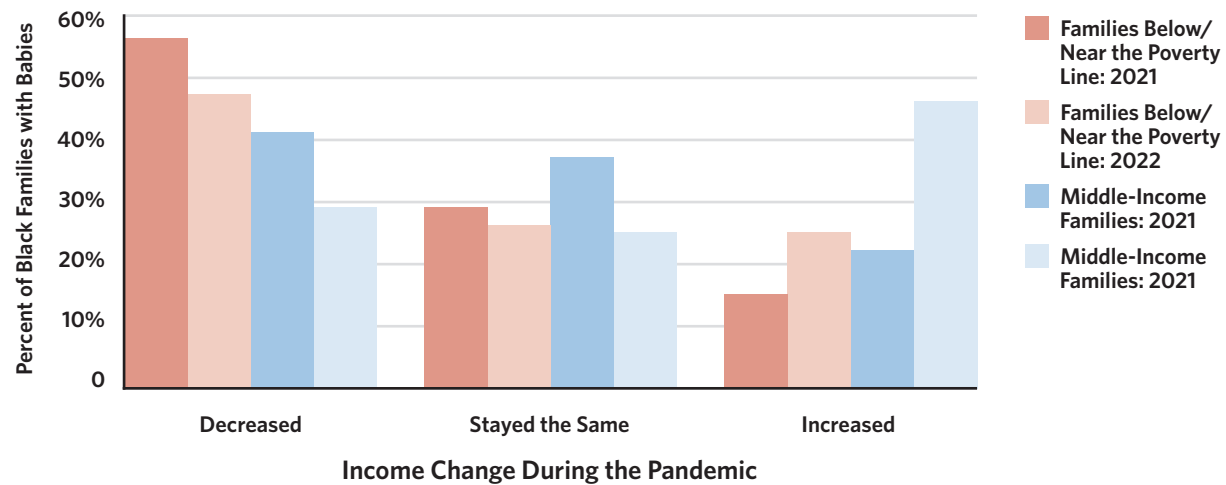
ECONOMIC SECURITY

More Black families with babies reported an increase in their income in 2022 compared to 2021—particularly Black middle-income families, nearly half of which reported an increase in 2022 compared to 25% in 2021. Black families below or near poverty also reported an increase in income (15% in 2021 vs. 25% in 2022). However, rising incomes did not lead to differences in the percentage of families that experienced financial strain between 2021 and 2022.

Over half of Black families with babies living near or below the poverty line experienced an income loss one year into the pandemic (see Figure 7). In the following year, the proportion fell slightly to 47%. A similar trend emerged for middle-income Black families with babies; 41% compared to 29% of families reported income losses in 2021 and 2022, respectively. A significant number of middle-income Black families with babies gained more income in 2022 (42%), which may have compensated for lost earnings earlier in the pandemic.



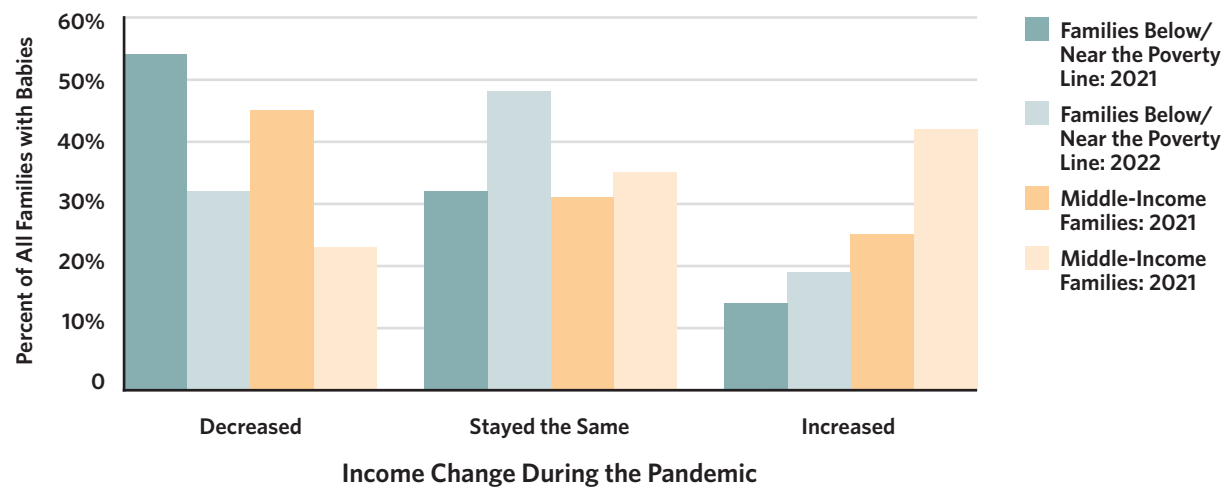
Figure 7. Income Stability among Black Families with Babies



Note. N = 782; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

The full RAPID-EC sample experienced similar income losses (see Figure 8). More than 50% of families living below or near the poverty line reported a loss of income in 2021. A year later, the proportion had declined significantly to one-in-three families among families living below or near the poverty line.

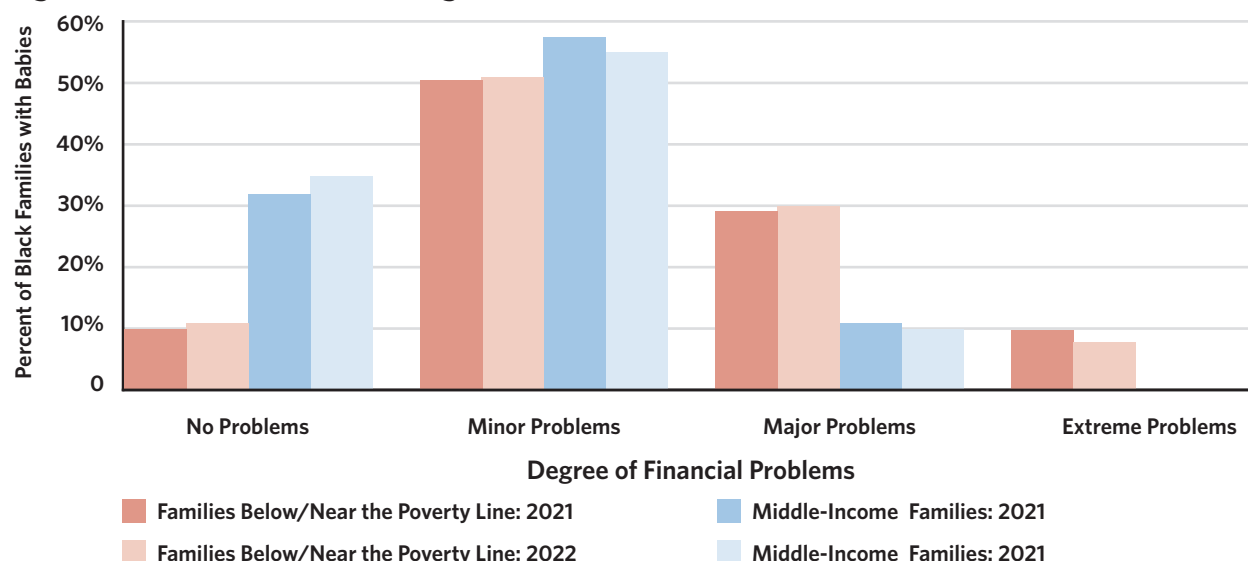
Figure 8. Income Stability among All Families with Babies



Note. N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022

The proportion of Black families that reported experience with financial strain remained relatively consistent over the course of the pandemic (see Figure 9). During the first and second years of the pandemic, major and extreme financial strain were more common among Black families with babies living below or near the poverty line (39% and 38%, respectively) than among middle-income Black families with babies (11% and 10%, respectively).

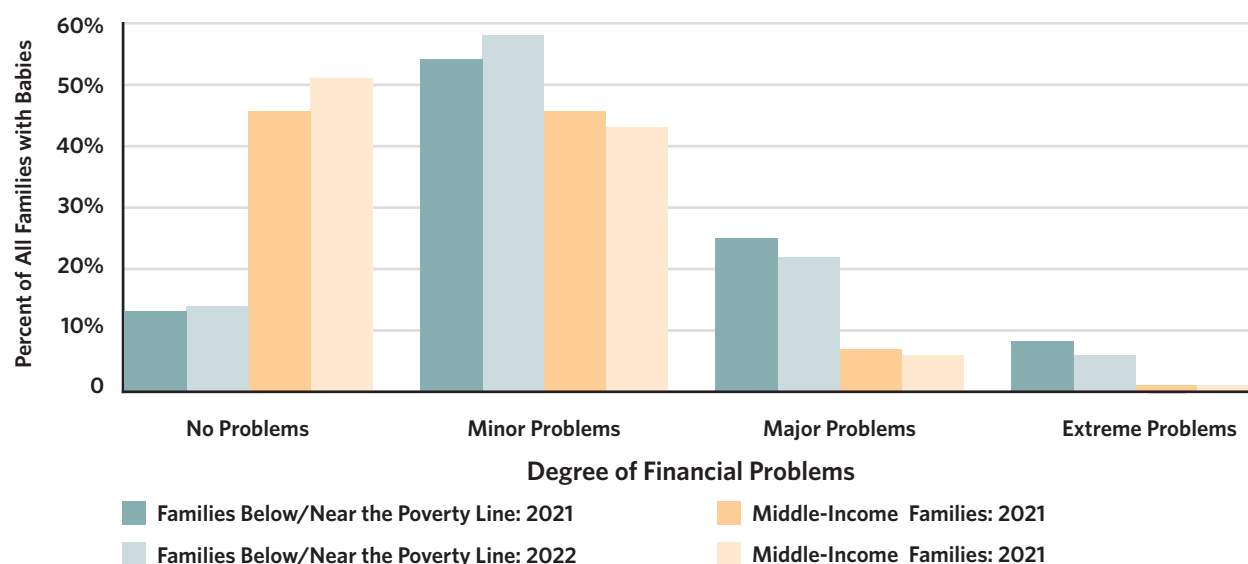
Figure 9. Financial Strain among Black Families with Babies



Note. N = 782; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Among middle-income families with babies, a greater proportion of the full RAPID-EC sample reported no financial problems (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Financial Strain among All Families with Babies



Note. N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

PARENTS' HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Fewer Black families reported delaying their own health care needs in 2022 compared to 2021, regardless of income level. Still, over half of Black parents postponed or delayed their health care during the second year of the pandemic. Reasons for delayed care included concern about exposure to COVID-19 in health care settings and the inability to find early care and education coverage for babies.

Black parents across all socioeconomic levels reported heightened levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness during the first year of the pandemic (2021); by year two, anxiety and stress levels began to subside. Throughout year two of the pandemic, depression levels declined among middle-income Black families compared to Black families living below or near poverty; however, the percentage of Black middle-income families that reported feeling lonely increased more than Black families below or near the poverty line.

In the first year of the pandemic, roughly three-in-four Black parents, regardless of income level, reported delaying their health care (see Table 3). Throughout the second year of the pandemic, the proportions dropped notably, from 77% to 55%, among families living below or near the poverty line and from 75% to 57% among middle-income families. Across income groups, concern about COVID-19 played a significant factor in Black parents' decisions to delay receiving health care. Among Black parents who delayed care, higher proportions reported caring for family, time away from work, and cost as main factors in the second year as opposed to the first.

Families in the full RAPID-EC sample displayed a positive trend toward improved health care maintenance, yet over half still delayed their health care visits. Similar to Black families, concern for COVID-19 exposure continued as the leading reason for delayed care.



Table 3. Black Families' Reasons for Delaying Their Health Care

	Black Families: 2021		Black Families: 2022		Change from 2021-2022		% Change from 2021-2022	
	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income
Delayed Health Care	77.51%	74.95%	54.95%	57.24%	-22.56%	-17.71%	-29.11%	-23.63%
Reason for Delay: ^a								
Concern for COVID-19	74.17%	69.37%	69.77%	78.57%	-4.40%	9.20%	-5.93%	13.26%
Inability to Find Early Care & Education	47.71%	41.95%	51.43%	51.06%	3.72%	9.11%	7.80%	21.72%
Time Away from Work	24.39%	24.00%	41.27%	37.21%	16.88%	13.21%	69.21%	55.04%
Cost	33.71%	30.89%	43.29%	34.88%	9.58%	3.99%	28.42%	12.92%
Caring for Family	34.37%	17.59%	43.08%	15.39%	8.71%	-2.20%	25.34%	-12.51%

Note. N = 782; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

^aBased on those who reported delaying health care.

Table 4. All Families' Reasons for Delaying Their Health Care

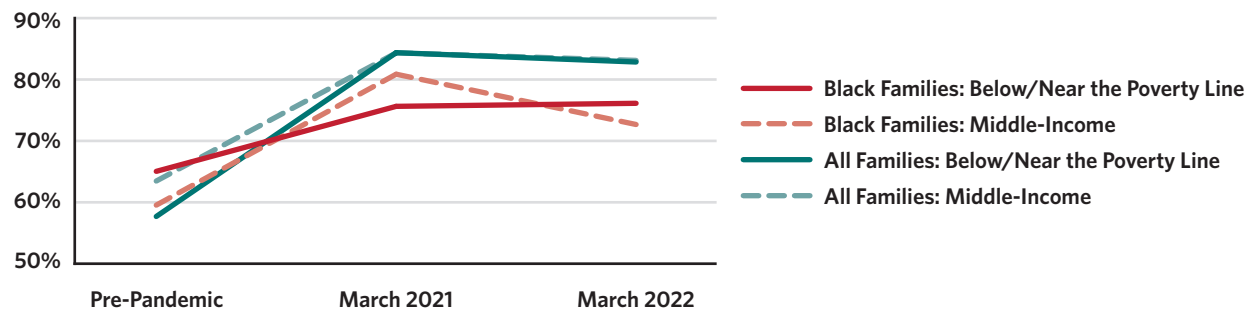
	Families: 2021		Families: 2022		Change from 2021-2022		% Change from 2021-2022	
	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income	Below/ Near-Poverty	Middle-Income
Delayed Health Care	80.02%	77.09%	57.43%	55.53%	-22.59%	-21.56%	-28.23%	-27.97%
Reason for Delay: ^a								
Concern for COVID-19	75.86%	75.39%	70.85%	78.84%	-5.01%	3.45%	-6.60%	4.58%
Inability to Find Early Care & Education	47.39%	40.91%	56.34%	57.17%	8.95%	16.26%	18.89%	39.75%
Time Away from Work	23.98%	21.55%	34.43%	40.17%	10.45%	18.62%	43.58%	86.40%
Cost	36.90%	27.51%	44.05%	36.28%	7.15%	8.77%	19.38%	31.88%
Caring for Family	30.74%	18.56%	39.53%	27.90%	8.79%	9.34%	28.59%	50.32%

Note. N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

^aBased on those who reported delaying health care.

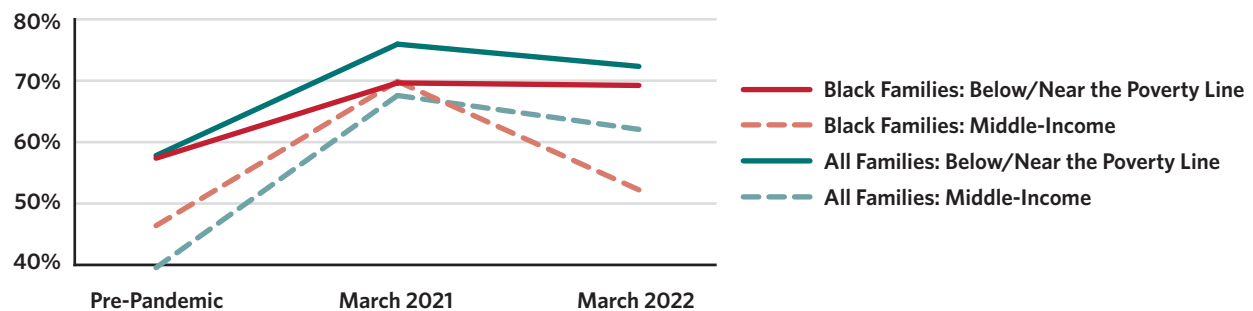
The majority of Black parents of babies reported experiencing threats to their mental health, including anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness. The proportions rose after the first year of the pandemic (March 2021) compared to the pre-pandemic period (see Figures 11-14). The elevated proportions generally continued into the second year, as a majority of parents continued to report experiencing anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness.

Figure 11. Anxiety Symptoms among Black Families and All Families with Babies



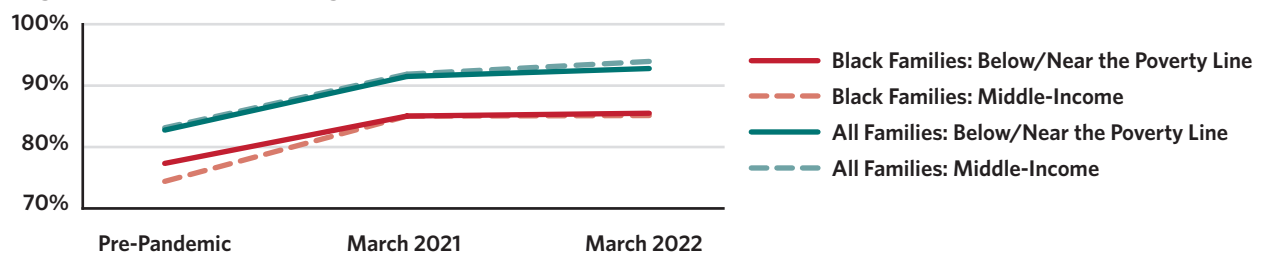
Note. Black families with babies N = 782; full sample with babies N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Figure 12. Depressive Symptoms among Black Families and All Families with Babies



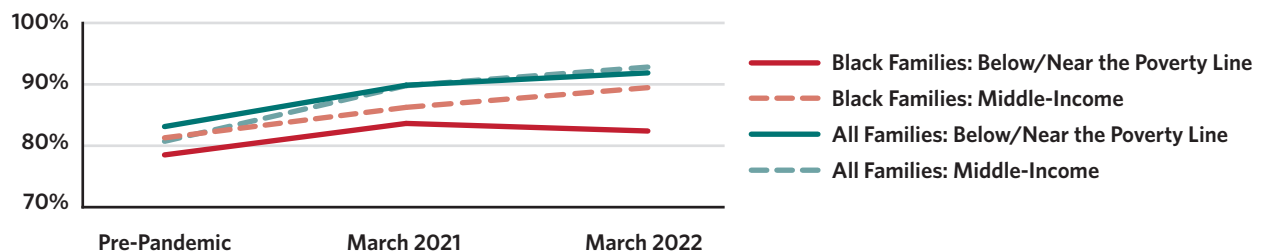
Note. Black families with babies N = 782; full sample with babies N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Figure 13. Stress among Black Families and All Families with Babies



Note. Black families with babies N = 782; full sample with babies N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Figure 14. Loneliness among Black Families and All Families with Babies



Note. Black families with babies N = 782; full sample with babies N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

BABIES' HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Concern about COVID exposure decreased slightly in year two, yet roughly one in three Black parents reported missing a well-baby visit during both the first and second years of the pandemic.² Black families living below or near the poverty line continued to report the inability to find child care as an ancillary reason for missing checkups in year two of the pandemic.

Many Black parents reported that their babies had displayed externalizing (fussy or defiant) behaviors during the first year of the pandemic that persisted into year two. Internalizing (fearful or anxious) behaviors declined during the second year of the pandemic, although not to pre-pandemic levels.



A large number of Black families that live below or near the poverty line, as well as Black middle-income families, reported a missed well-baby visit during the pandemic (see Table 5). Concerns about COVID-19 exposure continued to be the primary reason for delaying their babies' health care. Among families living below or near the poverty line, inability to find early care and education (for siblings) and caring for family were the other leading causes for delayed health care.

² This data for 2022 were collected before the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted emergency use authorization (EUA) to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 6 months to 5 years, as well as to Moderna's vaccine for kids ages 6 months to 6 years in June 2022. Soon after, on June 18, 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) endorsed the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIP) recommendation that all children 6 months through 5 years of age should receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Table 5. Black Families' Reasons for Delaying Well-baby Checkups

	Black Families: 2021		Black Families: 2022		Change from 2021-2022		% Change from 2021-2022	
	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income
Missed Well-Baby	33.58%	29.11%	34.86%	34.51%	1.28%	5.40%	3.81%	18.55%
Reason for Delay: ^a								
Concern for COVID-19	79.50%	81.45%	60.95%	69.87%	-18.55%	-11.58%	-23.33%	-14.22%
Inability to Find Early Care & Education	16.75%	5.88%	14.23%	2.56%	-2.52%	-3.32%	-15.04%	-56.46%
Time Away from Work	8.00%	9.50%	6.57%	13.46%	-1.43%	3.96%	-17.88%	41.68%
Cost	33.71%	30.89%	43.29%	34.88%	9.58%	3.99%	28.42%	12.92%
Caring for Family	34.37%	17.59%	43.08%	15.39%	8.71%	-2.20%	25.34%	-12.51%
Vaccine Hesitancy	15.25%	9.95%	9.12%	10.90%	-6.13%	0.95%	40.20%	9.55%
Doctor Cancellation	9.25%	9.50%	25.91%	32.05%	16.66%	22.55%	180.11%	237.37%
Transportation	7.25%	90.00%	12.04%	0.64%	4.79%	-89.36%	66.07%	-99.29%
Other	8.25%	12.66%	11.31%	7.05%	3.06%	-5.61%	37.09%	-44.31%

^aBased on those who reported delaying their child's check up

Missed well-baby checkups occurred frequently across the full RAPID-EC sample (see Table 6). Families living below or near the poverty line were particularly vulnerable. Middle-income families were less likely to report missing a well-baby checkup, and this proportion dropped further in the second year of the pandemic (one-in-five reported missing a checkup) from the first year (nearly one-in-four).

Table 6. All Families' Reasons for Delaying Well-baby Checkups

	2021		2022		Change from 2021-2022		% Change from 2021-2022	
	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income	Below/ Near- Poverty	Middle- Income
Missed Well-Baby	35.72%	23.38%	36.20%	20.47%	0.48%	-2.91%	1.34%	-12.45%
Reason for Delay: ^a								
Concern for COVID-19	75.58%	74.20%	59.65%	66.70%	-15.93%	-7.50%	-21.08%	-10.11%
Inability to Find Early Care & Education	13.96%	8.55%	15.52%	10.84%	1.56%	2.29%	11.17%	26.78%
Time Away from Work	5.67%	4.88%	8.26%	7.95%	2.59%	3.07%	45.68%	62.91%
Cost	6.28%	4.81%	6.54%	2.71%	0.26%	-2.10%	4.14%	-43.66%
Caring for Family	6.38%	3.81%	8.21%	2.80%	1.83%	-1.01%	28.68%	-26.51%
Vaccine Hesitancy	9.18%	4.81%	6.78%	4.59%	-2.40%	-0.22%	-26.14%	-4.57%
Doctor Cancellation	10.90%	9.23%	28.98%	29.31%	18.08%	20.08%	165.87%	217.55%
Transportation	3.25%	55.00%	10.51%	1.92%	7.26%	-53.08%	223.38%	-96.51%
Other	14.34%	22.31%	10.32%	10.20%	-4.02%	-12.11%	-28.03%	-54.28%

^aBased on those who reported delaying their child's check up

Parents were asked if their children displayed fussy or defiant (i.e., externalizing) and fearful or anxious (i.e., internalizing) behaviors during the previous week and prior to the pandemic. Larger proportions of parents, particularly in the full sample, reported more of these behaviors in the first year of the pandemic than prior to the pandemic (see Table 7). The proportion of externalizing behaviors remained constant during year two while internalizing behaviors fell slightly.

Table 7. Babies' Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors Reported by Black Families and All Families

	Externalizing			Internalizing		
	Pre-Pandemic	March 2021	March 2022	Pre-Pandemic	March 2021	March 2022
Black Parents of Babies						
Below/Near-Poverty	53.95%	77.22%	76.73%	18.17%	36.38%	29.70%
Middle-Income	46.23%	77.02%	74.54%	18.90%	42.85%	26.36%
All Parents of Babies						
Below/Near-Poverty	54.42%	83.28%	83.91%	20.37%	43.93%	37.49%
Middle-Income	47.65%	80.19%	78.70%	16.27%	36.27%	32.17%

Note. Black families with babies N = 782; full sample with babies N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.



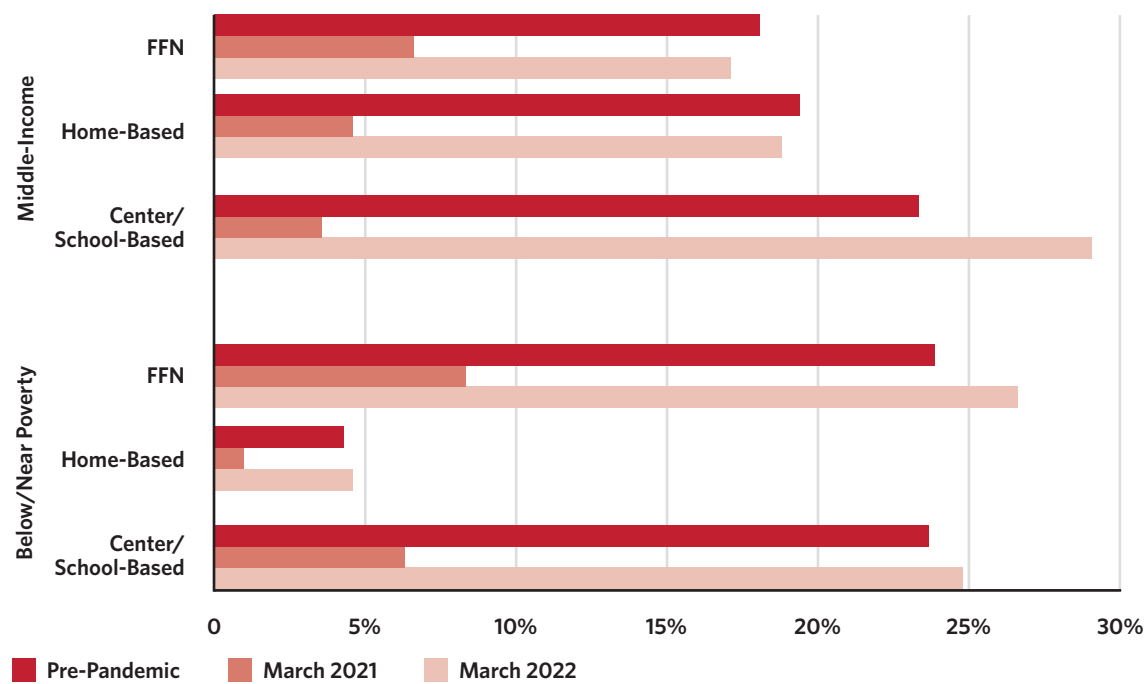
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION (ECE)

Black families across all income levels rated center-/school-based care and friend, family, or neighbor (FFN) care as the most common forms of early care and education (ECE) settings for their children. Among middle-income Black families with babies, home-based care ranked second to center-/school-based. ECE usage, regardless of type, fell drastically during the first year of the pandemic before returning to pre-pandemic levels in the second year. Black families' center-/school-based care use in 2022 exceeded rates in 2021. The rate of FFN care use in 2022 among Black families living below or near the poverty line also slightly exceeded rates in 2021.

In comparison to pre-pandemic levels, Black families' use of ECE declined considerably in the first year of the pandemic (see Figure 15). Throughout the second year of the pandemic, families increased their ECE usage; specifically, center-/school-based and FFN care was reported at a higher rate than pre-pandemic levels across income groups. Similar patterns emerged across the full sample of RAPID-EC (see Figure 16), with a full return to all three care types in the second year of the pandemic.

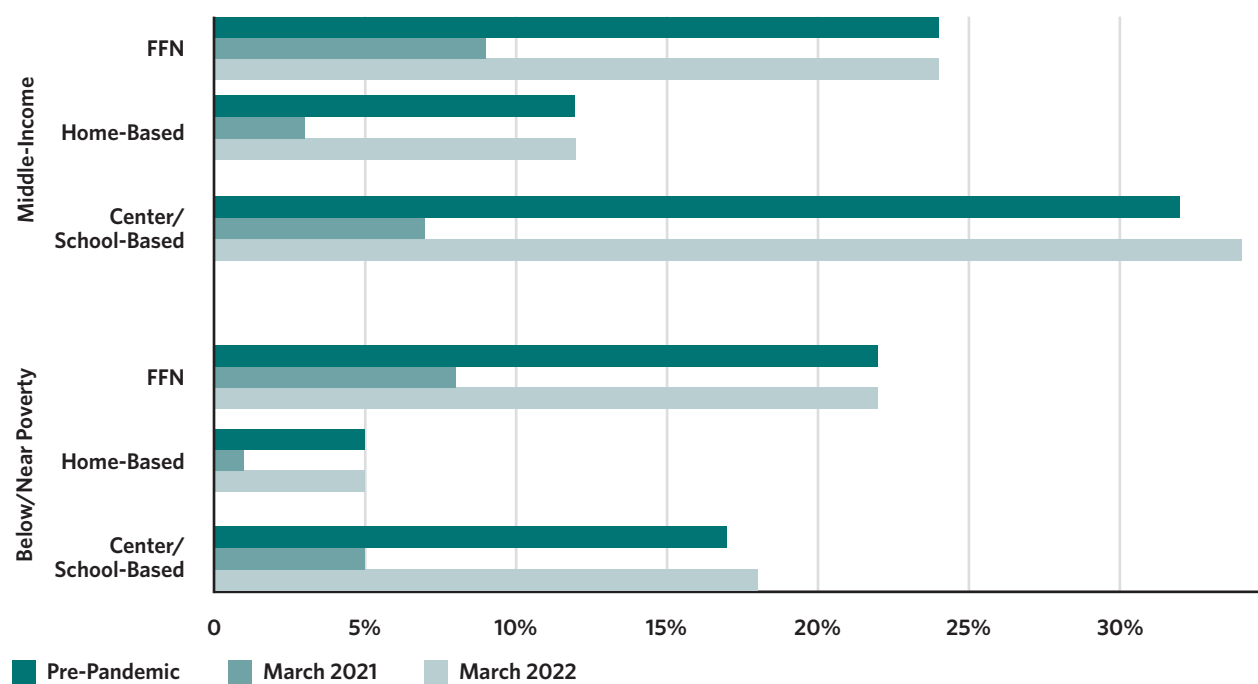


Figure 15. Changes in Nonparental ECE During Pandemic among Black Families with Babies



Note. N = 782. RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.
FFN = Friend, Family, and Neighbor

Figure 16. Changes in Nonparental ECE During Pandemic among All Families with Babies



Note. N = 9,991; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and February 16, 2022.

Preserving Black children's cultural identity

RACIAL-ETHNIC IDENTITY

Parental cultural socialization practices, such as communicating positive messages to children about their racial groups, are among the many strategies adopted by Black parents to help their children cope and thrive in a racialized society. Although more Black parents, regardless of income, reported engaging in conversations about the challenges rather than advantages of their race, more middle-income Black families discussed these challenges in year two of the pandemic compared to year one (53% in year two vs. 39% in year one), though more Black families below/near poverty discussed challenges and advantages compared to other families.

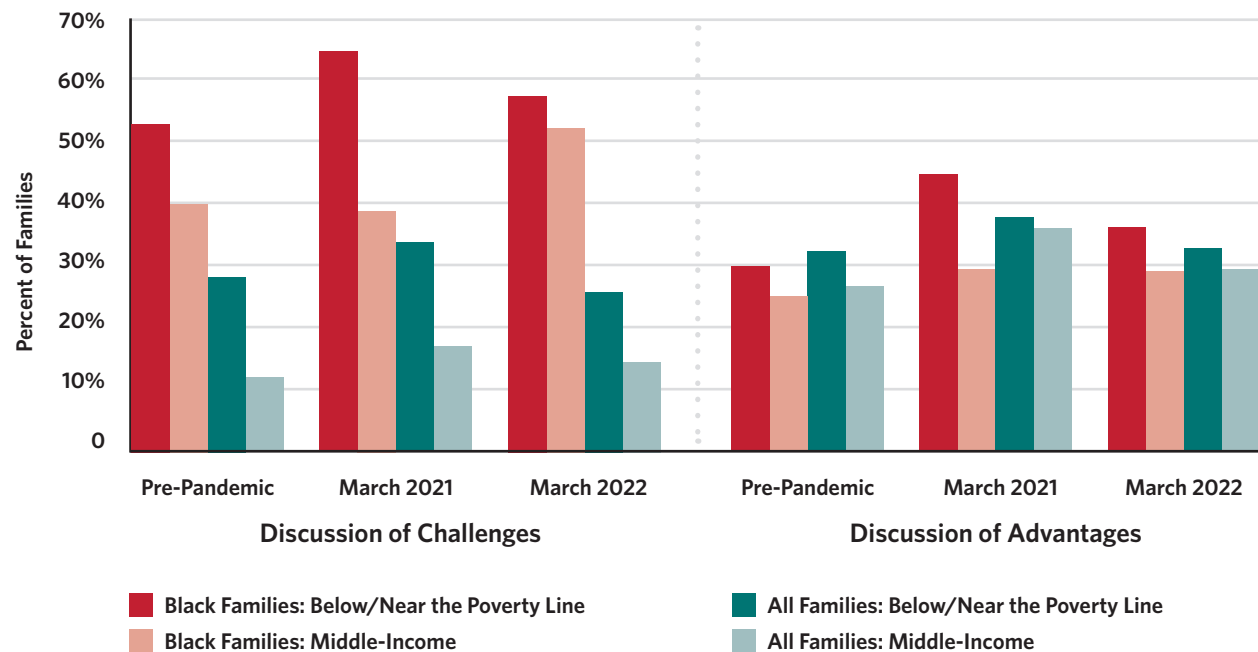
Parents were asked about discussions with their children around the advantages and the potential challenges encountered because of their race or ethnicity. Many Black parents, particularly among families living below/near the poverty line, reported engaging in conversations with their babies about the advantages and challenges faced due to their race or ethnicity (see Figure 17). Prior to the pandemic, more than half (53%) of Black parents living below or near the poverty line reported discussing challenges with their babies. This proportion increased to 65% a year into the pandemic before dropping slightly

to 58% in March 2022. Among middle-income Black families with babies, more parents engaged in conversations about challenges by March 2022 (53%) than prior to or one year into the pandemic (40% and 39%, respectively).

Fewer Black parents reported engagement in conversation around advantages their children may experience related to their race or ethnicity. Over the course of the pandemic, higher proportions of Black families living below or near the poverty line (44%) engaged in discussions about the advantages compared to middle-income Black families. During both periods of the pandemic, more Black parents of babies reported engagement in conversation around both the advantages and challenges their children may face due to their race or ethnicity compared to parents of babies in the full RAPID-EC sample.



Figure 17. Discussions about Challenges and Advantages Related to Race Reported by Black Families and All Families with Babies



Note. Black families with babies Pre-Pandemic N = 265; March 2021 N = 235; March 2022 N = 191.
 All families with babies Pre-Pandemic N = 4,188; March 2021 N = 3,124; March 2022 N = 3,326.
 RAPID-EC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and February 16, 2022.



FINDINGS

Psychological trauma continues to afflict Black families. Discriminatory experiences, such as being victimized by racial harassment, continue to be a challenge for Black families and further incite worry among parents about treatment of and equitable opportunities for their Black child and their ability to thrive in U.S. society. While this report shows a reduction in parents' reporting of discriminatory experiences, this shift can likely be attributed to the consequences of COVID-19, including shut-downs, masking, limited public gatherings, etc., rather than a lessening of harmful racialized experiences more generally.

Black families' economic security improved slightly during the second year of the pandemic but continues to be tenuous. Policies that bolstered household income over past the two years overwhelmingly benefited middle-income families compared to families below or near the poverty line. Despite the infusion of income from pandemic-related aid, Black families at each socioeconomic level continued to experience volatility including difficulty in meeting basic needs such as housing and child care.

Black families continue to prioritize their health and the well-being of their children during the pandemic, although COVID-19 remains a threat. Whether addressing their delayed health care needs, attending baby wellness checkups, strengthening their children's positive racial identity, or returning to early care and education programs, Black families continue to identify ways and means to be resilient. Parents' heightened levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness increased at the start of the pandemic but later showed evidence of decline, specifically levels of anxiety and stress. Depression, however, remains a concern for all families.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Black families continue to disproportionately feel the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are compounded by systemic racism. National, state, and local leaders and policies must continue to attend to the unique needs of Black families and babies support their recovery from the devastating impact of this global pandemic. Multi-sectoral and cross-agency collaborations rooted in anti-racist frameworks, policies, and strategies are critical.

Based on these report findings, we call for the following immediate prioritized actions:

Protect Black babies and their families from racism, discrimination, and material hardship.

Two years into what some term the “dual pandemic” of racism and COVID-19, Black parents remain concerned about the unfair and harsh treatment their child will experience because of their race. Parents with babies, especially those living below or near the poverty line, remain concerned about accessing material support, such as housing. Provision of these basic resources, along with ensuring the social and psychological safety of children and families free from discrimination, is one way to create a stable foundation during this sensitive period of development.

Promote economic security, along with mobility and access to high-quality and affirming health care and early learning environments, for Black families and their babies to ensure their well-being. While income levels for Black families, especially those in middle-income households, increased over the past two years, these families still experience financial strain. This financial strain, coupled with ongoing concerns about COVID-19, seem to impact parents’ ability to find a culturally appropriate outlet and services that can support their own mental health needs. Increased use of early care and education in the second year of the pandemic does not allay many parents’ concerns about accessing high-quality early care and education, especially given the limited availability and high cost of care.

Preserve Black children’s cultural identity and positive sense of self, a necessary developmental outcome, despite the continued racial stress and trauma present in their daily lives due to ongoing discrimination and biases. Black parents should not continue to shoulder the burden of racism alone while striving to ensure their child thrives and succeeds in a society that fails to recognize the best in their babies. Parents, caregivers, community members, institutions, and organizations must work collaboratively to ensure children’s family, culture, language, communities, and institutions are well-preserved as part of the American tapestry of excellence and brilliance.



Endnotes

- ⁱ Consistent with experts in the field (Melzi et al., 2020), we use “Latine” to refer to individuals whose cultural background originated in Latin America. In U.S. academic circles, “Latinx” is used as a gender-inclusive term to refer to people from Latin American backgrounds, but Spanish-speakers find that “Latinx” is unpronounceable in Spanish. Therefore, we have opted to use the gender-inclusive term “Latine,” commonly used throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America; Melzi, G., McWayne, C., & Ochoa, W. (2020). Family engagement and Latine children’s early narrative skills. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-13.
- ⁱⁱ Shrider, E.A., Kollar, M., Chen, F., & Semega, J. (2020, September 14). Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020. Report Number P60-273 <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html#:~:text=Median%20household%20income%20was%20%2467%2C521,median%20household%20income%20since%202011>
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- ^{iv} National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM]. (2019). *Vibrant and Healthy Kids: Aligning Science, Practice, and Policy to Advance Health Equity*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17226/25466>
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- ^x Iruka, I. U., Durden, T. R., Gardner-Neblett, N., Ibekwe-Okafor, N., Sansbury, A., & Telfer, N. A. (2021). Attending to the Adversity of Racism Against Young Black Children. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(2), 175–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211029313>