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Housing Insecurity During the Coronavirus Response

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The COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous challenges for Americans in their ability to meet their basic needs. One specific economic challenge is housing security (i.e., the ability to pay the full amount of rent or mortgage due each month). This brief describes current and projected housing insecurity using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey for the period of April 23 to July 14, 2020.

How is COVID-19 affecting Current Housing Insecurity?

Current housing insecurity indicates that a household did not pay last month's mortgage or rent on time, including households with deferred payment status. Figure 1 shows trends in the percentage of U.S. households that owed mortgage or rent and did not make last month's payment for the United States overall, New York State, and New York City.

KEY FINDINGS

- From April 23 to July 14, nearly 15% of households nationally, 19% in New York State, and 22% in the New York City metro area reported not making last month's housing payment.

- Renters consistently reported higher levels of current and future housing insecurity than homeowner households.

- Concerns about future housing security follow the national trend in new COVID-19 infections. Confidence increased moderately from mid-May through mid-June, then declined again, approaching estimates closer to those of early-May by mid-July.
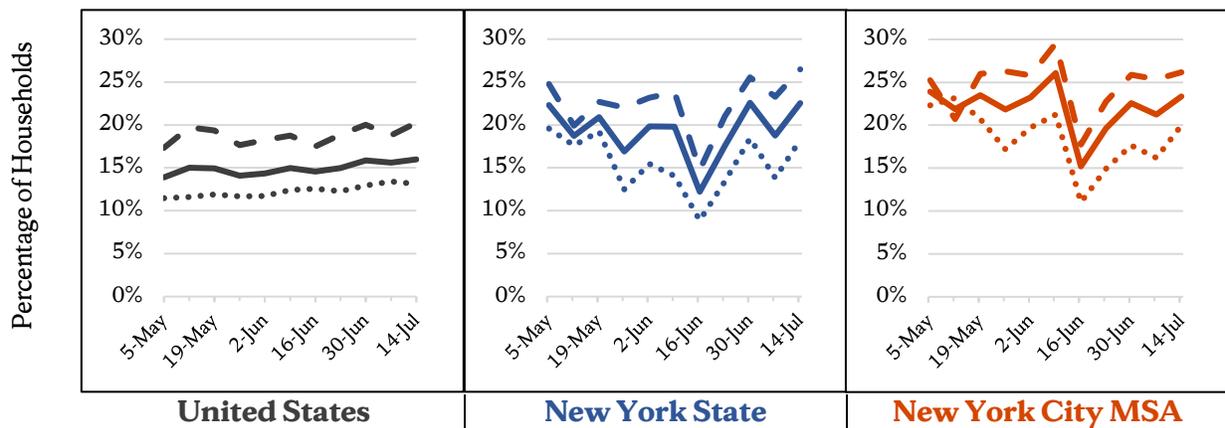

Figure 1. Households Owing Mortgage/Rent that Did Not Make Last Month's Payment
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey
Note: The figure reports the weighted percentage of households that did not pay their last month's mortgage or rent or that had their payment deferred. The New York City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) covers households located in the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area.

Nationally, nearly 15% of households reported not making last month's housing payment. National levels fluctuated between 14-15% from early-May through mid-June. For the week ending July 14, housing insecurity levels increased to 16%—the highest reported level to date. The level of housing insecurity for New York State averaged just above 19% over the reporting period (over 4% higher than the national average) and fluctuated between 12-23%. Although estimates for the week ending June 16 dropped almost 7% below average, insecurity in the week ending June 30 reached the highest reported level and remained high through July 14. Housing insecurity in the New York City metropolitan area averaged 22% (over 7% higher than the national average) and fluctuated between 15-27%. Despite a spike in early-June and a nearly 11% decrease in mid-June, households reporting nonpayment remained above 20% from late-June through mid-July.

In both New York State and New York City, the difference in housing insecurity between renters and owners increased over time. While both reported similar insecurity levels in the early weeks of the survey, by mid-May renters consistently reported higher housing insecurity compared to homeowners. Further, trend data indicate that over the 11-week reporting period, housing insecurity levels have decreased for owners and increased or showed little change for renters in the state and NYC metropolitan area. On average, renters report 6.5% higher levels of housing insecurity nationally, 6.9% higher in New York state, and 6.1% higher in New York City. Overall, trend data indicate that over the 11-week reporting period, current housing insecurity levels have increased nationally and showed little change in New York State and New York City.

How is COVID-19 affecting Concerns about Future Housing Insecurity?

Future housing payment concern is defined as little to no confidence in the ability to make the next month's mortgage or rent payment. Figure 2 shows trends in concerns related to future housing payments.
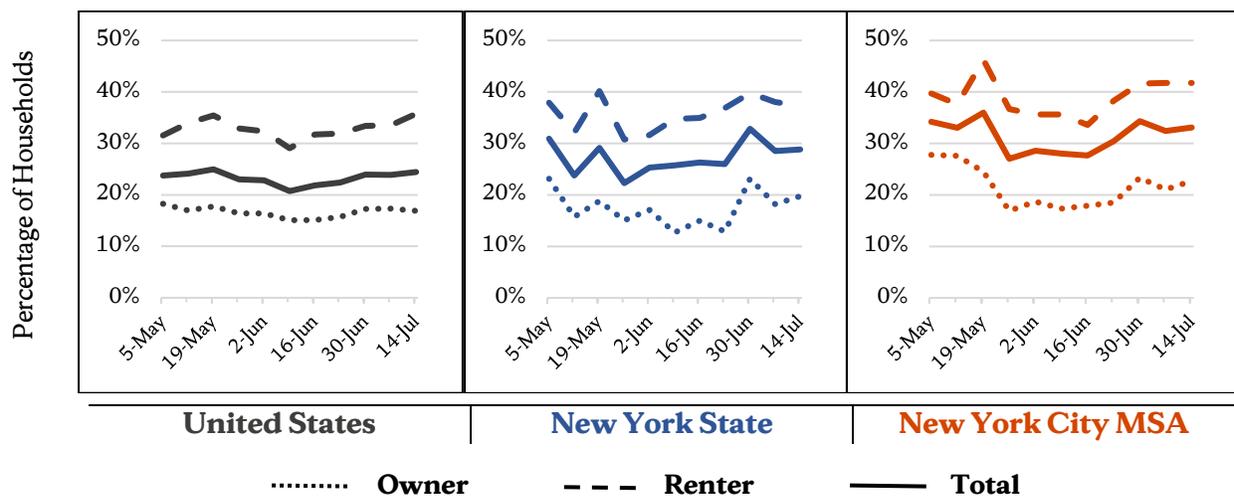

Figure 2. Households Not Confident in Ability to Make Next Month's Mortgage or Rent Payment

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey. The housing payment confidence measure reports the weighted percentage of households that expressed little to no confidence in their ability to make this month's rent or mortgage payment. The New York City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) covers households located in the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area.

Nationally, concern about future housing payments averaged just over 23% and ranged between 20-25% over the 11-week period. Estimates from late-June through mid-July indicated that over 24% of households were not confident in their ability to pay the upcoming month's housing payment, including nearly 36% of renter households. Concern about future housing payments for New York State averaged about 27% (almost 4% higher than the national average) and ranged between 22-33% over time. Estimates increased in late-June through mid-July, when nearly 29% of households expressed no confidence in their ability to pay the upcoming month's housing payment, including just over 37% of renter households. The New York City metropolitan area levels averaged over 31% (8% higher than the national average) and ranged between 27-36% over time. Estimates increased in late-June through mid-July, when approximately 33% of households were not confident in their ability to pay the upcoming month's housing payment, including just under 42% of renter households.

The trend of future housing payment concern follows the national trend in the level of new COVID-19 infections. From mid-May through mid-June, household confidence in the ability to make next month's payment improved moderately across all three levels of geography. However, in mid-to-late June, household confidence declined across all three geographic regions and approached estimates similar to those from early-May. For all three geographic regions, renters reported levels of future housing payment concern that were consistently 10% or higher compared to owners. Over the 11-week period, the difference in renter vs. owner confidence averaged approximately 16% nationally, 18% statewide, and 17% in the metropolitan area.

Policies in Place to Protect Homeowners and Renters

Temporary housing policies have been enacted to delay eviction and foreclosure procedures for affected populations, but many existing provisions are set to expire between late-July and late-August. Nationally, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act established a temporary moratorium on evictions and foreclosures for properties insured through the Federal Housing Administration, and a similar policy was established for properties insured through Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac. These policies covered 28% of U.S. rental units.[1] However, the renter eviction moratorium expired June 24, and provisions for single-family units, which were initially set to expire at the end of June, were extended through the end of August.[2] Currently, homeowners demonstrating financial hardship due to the pandemic are eligible to request a 180-day mortgage forbearance (with a 180-day extension option).[3]

New York issued a 90-day eviction moratorium that expired on June 20 and extended a more targeted moratorium covering tenants financially impacted by COVID-19 through August 20.[4] The state also enacted the Tenant Safe Harbor Act that prevents tenants from being evicted for unpaid rent while state-mandated COVID-19 restrictions are in place. However, renters are still legally responsible for making missed payments.[5] On July 16, the state launched a short-term COVID Rent Relief Program that provides one-time rental assistance for eligible low-income renters.[6] Federal and state legislators are currently considering bills that could offer additional mortgage and rent relief support, but housing policy experts have cautioned that unless additional measures are taken, a wave of eviction and foreclosure proceedings may hit New York City, the state, and the nation as the primary federal and state moratoria expire.[7,8]

Data and Methods

The figures show weekly survey estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, which provides real-time estimates of how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting U.S. households. The survey will collect weekly household data for 90 days. This brief describes 11 weeks of data from the weeks ending May 5 through July 14. Week 1 covers 13 days (April 23-May 5). The remaining weeks cover six-day periods.

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Acknowledgements

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