

THE SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19 STUDY

Survey Methodology Report



Background

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, and economic shutdowns began in March 2020, households across the United States were faced with an unprecedented crisis that would affect their health, financial security and overall well-being for an unforeseeable amount of time. In order to examine and track the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic on households, as well as the efficacy of different public and private efforts to mitigate these impacts, the Social Policy Institute at Washington University in St. Louis (SPI) launched the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 Survey (SEICS) in the United States just weeks after the pandemic became a national crisis. A similar study was conducted in Israel, however, this report is exclusive to the United States. The SEICS:

- Is a 5-wave, online survey collected at quarterly intervals between April 2020, and June 2021;
- Utilizes a hybrid longitudinal and cross-sectional design, which recruits new respondents in each wave while also allowing for re-contacts of prior-wave respondents;
- Recruits roughly 5,000 respondents per wave;
- Uses a quota-sampling methodology to ensure national representation in terms of age, race/ethnicity, gender and income;
- Contains a highly detailed set of questions (roughly 200 per wave) capturing a diverse array of household experiences during the pandemic.

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Administration

Each wave of the SEICS was administered online through Qualtrics, and all respondents were recruited from Qualtrics panels. Panel members were invited into the survey via an email from Qualtrics, who also provided the incentives for survey completion. Table 1 shows the dates in which each wave was fielded and, for each wave, the number of panelists who were invited to the survey, the number who entered the survey, and the number who completed the survey.

TABLE 1. RATE OF SURVEY COMPLETION BY WAVE

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
Dates	4/22/2020 - 6/2/2020	7/30/2020 - 9/9/2020	11/3/2020 - 12/29/2020	2/4/2021 - 3/18/2021	5/12/2021 - 6/21/2021
Invited #	150,000	170,000	122,000	147,000	160,000
Entered Survey	16,200	17,100	16,500	10,000	12,000
Number of Completed Responses	5,038	5,033	4,893	4,943	5,051
Number of New Respondents	5,038	2,490	2,923	3,305	1,882

We employed a quota-based sampling procedure to ensure that our sample would reflect the Census Bureau’s 2019 estimates of the U.S. adult population across four dimensions: gender, race, household income and age. Research has demonstrated that online, non-probability samples using Qualtrics panels generate samples that closely approximate those of the General Social Survey, which is considered the gold standard in survey administration¹.

Each wave of the survey consists of roughly 5,000 respondents, and every survey wave after Wave 1 includes both re-contacts and new respondents². For example, respondents who completed Wave 1 were invited first to complete Wave 2. Then, two weeks later, new respondents were invited to take the survey to backfill any remaining quotas that the re-contacted respondents did not fill. In all subsequent waves, respondents who completed at least one prior wave were first to be invited to all subsequent waves. As shown in Table 1, each survey wave after Wave 1 was divided roughly evenly between new and returning respondents.

Sample

We employed quota-based sampling to ensure that our sample is representative of adults living in the United States across four dimensions: gender, race, household income and age. Since these four dimensions are highly correlated with other characteristics of a population (e.g., debt level, geography, political preference), our sample is nationally representative on a wide range of dimensions. Table 2 compares characteristics of the SEICS Wave 1 sample with those of the population of adults in the U.S., as measured through the Census Bureau’s 2019 American Community Survey (1-year estimates).

As Table 2 shows, the SEICS sample generally approximates the population of adults living in the United States. The racial/ethnic composition of our sample closely matched that of the population, as did the income distribution. On average,

¹ Zack, E. S., Kennedy, J., & Long, J. S. (2019). Can nonprobability samples be used for social science research? A cautionary tale. *Survey Research Methods*, 13(2), 215-227.

² In the second wave of the SEICS, we conducted an oversample of Spanish-speaking respondents (and included a Spanish option for the survey). Due to this oversample, Wave 2 has a larger overall sample size.

SEICS respondents were roughly four years younger than adult ACS respondents. The distribution of SEICS respondents across census sub-regions was highly similar to the distribution of adults to the ACS. The gender distribution of the SEICS sample was also very similar to U.S. adult population. However, SEICS respondents had more formal education than the population of adults in the United States, as SEICS respondents were much more likely to have a bachelor's degree than the general adult population.

TABLE 2. NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVENESS OF SEICS SAMPLE

Characteristic	SEICS Wave 1	2019 ACS (1-Year Estimates)
Age	46.6	50.4
Race/Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic (%)	61.7	60.7
Black, Non-Hispanic (%)	12.2	12.3
Asian, Non-Hispanic (%)	5.3	5.5
Hispanic (%)	17.4	18.0
Other (%)	2.4	4.3
Male (%)	49.6	48.5
College (%)	57.4	31.9
Census Sub Region		
Pacific (%)	15.1	16.2
Mountain (%)	8.2	7.4
West North Central (%)	6.3	6.7
East North Central (%)	14.7	14.7
West South Central (%)	9.6	10.6
East South Central (%)	4.5	6.0
South Atlantic	21.1	20.3
Middle Atlantic	15.5	13.2
New England	5.1	4.9
Born Outside the United States (%)	10.0	13.8
Gross Household Income		
Less than \$25,000 (%)	16.3	18.0
\$25,001 - \$50,000 (%)	22.7	20.4
\$50,001 to \$75,000 (%)	16.5	17.4
\$75,001 to \$100,000 (%)	14.4	12.8
More than \$100,000 (%)	30.2	31.4

As with any survey, there may be ways in which our sample systematically differs from the full adult population in the United States. Because the survey was only offered online, everyone in our sample had at least basic internet access. With the exception of Wave 2 (which was also offered in Spanish), all waves of the SEICS were administered exclusively in English. Nevertheless, the SEICS sample closely approximates the general population of adults in the United States. The Social Policy Institute researchers also generated population weights from the American Community Survey to ensure that SEICS sample more closely approximates the general population.

Comparison to Other COVID-19 Surveys and Overview of SEICS Modules

Several other organizations also collected survey data on U.S. households during the pandemic. For example, the United States Census Bureau, in collaboration with a number of other federal agencies, developed the Household Pulse Survey (HPS), a short survey with repeated cross-sections enabling policymakers and researchers to quickly gain insights about households’ changing conditions during the pandemic. The SEICS differs from the HPS and many other COVID-19-related surveys in several important ways. Most notably, the SEICS’ longitudinal component allows researchers to track the ways in which the certain respondents’ behaviors and outcomes changed in the 14 months after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.

The SEICS also differs from the HPS in its level of depth. While the respondents to the HPS answer up to 50 questions, respondents to a given wave of the SEICS regularly answered over 200 questions³. Although the SEICS includes several questions that also appear in the HPS, the length of the SEICS allows for additional follow-up questions.

The SEICS questionnaires include topics that are unaddressed in the HPS and many other surveys. For example, the SEICS includes questions relating to gender identity and sexual orientation—questions that are excluded from the HPS due to federal regulations. Waves of the SEICS also included survey experiments on a breadth of topics ranging from universal basic income to vaccine hesitancy.

In Table 3, we include an overview of the modules included in each wave of the SEICS.

TABLE 3. SURVEY MODULES BY WAVE

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
Demographics ⁴	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Employment & Income	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gig Employment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Business Ownership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Debts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alternative Financial Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Assets	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hardship, Eviction & Food Insecurity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

³ Certain questions are only showed to respondents who give specific answers to other questions. For example, a respondent who reported not having any children in their household would not see follow-up questions about children in their household. Therefore, the total number of responses to the survey can vary substantially between respondents.

⁴ In Waves 3 through 5, this module included questions regarding economic mobility.

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
Food Access	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Government Benefits Participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Universal Basic Income Experiment			✓		✓
Financial Behaviors & Well-being ⁵	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Financial Planning & Literacy ⁶	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family Financial Networks			✓	✓	✓
Health	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mental Health Treatment				✓	✓
Social Distancing Behaviors ⁷	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vaccination Expectation & Behaviors ⁸			✓	✓	✓
Vaccine Incentives Survey Experiment				✓	
Child Tax Credit Expansion Experiment					✓
Child Care & Child Schooling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
COVID-19 Symptoms & Testing ⁹	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discrimination		✓	✓	✓	✓
2020 Election Participation			✓		
Social Media Consumption				✓	
Financial Exploitation & Risk				✓	✓

Accessing the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 Survey Data

The Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 Survey uniquely documents the social and economic impacts of a global pandemic as people experienced the global pandemic. These findings can inform social, economic and health policies now and in the future. Though the data from the survey are not publicly available, they are freely available on a limited basis to interested researchers. If you or your organization are interested in accessing the cleaned and coded survey data, or would like more information about the survey, please reach out to the Social Policy Institute at socialpolicyinstitute@wustl.edu.

The research within this brief does not reflect the views or opinions of the funders.

5 In Waves 1 and 2, this module included questions about spending, which were removed in later waves.

6 Financial literacy questions were added to this section in Wave 2.

7 In Waves 2 through 4, this module included detailed questions regarding protest attendance.

8 Wave 2 included one question regarding likelihood of future COVID-19 vaccination as part of a different module. Waves 3 and 4 asked about flu vaccine receipt and reasons for both COVID-19 and flu vaccine hesitancy. Waves 4 and 5 also asked about receipt of the COVID-19 vaccine.

9 In Waves 3 through 5, this module included questions regarding COVID-19 symptoms of friends/family members. Also, Wave 3 included a set of questions regarding the reasons for skipping COVID-19 testing.