

RAPID-Harris County Data Update

Many Young Families Face Stress

April 2025

RAPID-HARRIS COUNTY

The RAPID Survey on child and family well-being has partnered with Harris County and the UH Institute for Research on Women, Gender & Sexuality (IRWGS) to hear from families with children under six, as of March 2023.¹ IRWGS works with community partners to connect with parents and other caregivers, who were paid for their time. The data gathered on material hardship, health, mental health, child-care use and needs, and much more will be used to provide stakeholders with actionable insights to inform immediate and long-term program and policy decisions.

Recent surveys show many young families under stress on multiple fronts. Those include increasing financial stress, Covid after-effects, climate-change concerns and the effects of Hurricane Beryl on well-being and future planning. These are in addition to such constant stresses on families as balancing everyone’s needs and affordable childcare/workforce access. Many new mothers also experience poor mental health postpartum

1. FINANCIAL STRESS

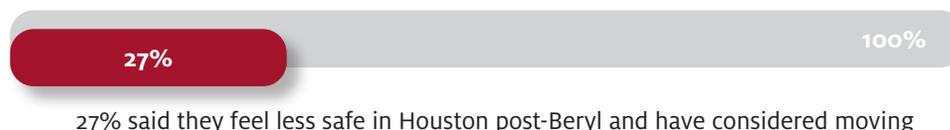
Households **reporting debt** in October 2024 rose **10 percentage-points** vs. the same group’s initials responses (4.2023-4.2024). Credit card debt 63%; medical debt 42% (some had both).



- **66% of households found it at least somewhat hard to pay for basic items**; among them 72% found it hard to pay for Food, 56% for Utilities, and 52% Housing.

2. CATASTROPHES

- **Covid: 78% of households had a member contract COVID-19**, with 18% having a member experience long-term symptoms and 21.6% having had an extended family fatality.
- **Hurricane Beryl:**
 - **49% of respondents felt “not very prepared” or “not prepared at all” for Beryl.**
 - **71% said Beryl negatively affected their children’s wellbeing** (needing extra comfort, disrupted sleep, increased fear/anxiety and tantrums) & **85% their own.**
 - **27% said they feel less safe in Houston post-Beryl and have considered moving.**



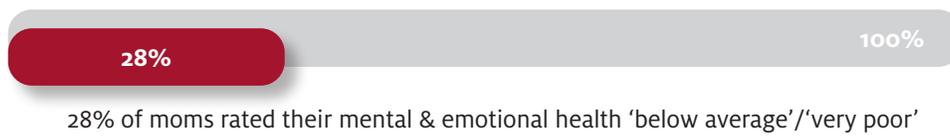
¹ As of December 2024, 1,221 parents of children under six reached via 17 community partners have responded. Re Race/Ethnicity, 46% identify as Hispanic/Latine, 25% as NH White, 19% as NH Black, 7% as NH Asian, and the rest as others. Overall, in Harris County families with kids under 6 are: 51.8% Hispanic, 18.8% NH White, 17.5% NH Black, 5.1% NH Asian, 5.8% NH Multi-Race, 1.1% Other (ACS, 2021). Each survey involves a subset of the whole.

3. NEW MOMS' MENTAL HEALTH

Postpartum Experience

- For the 2 months after their most recent birth, **28% of mothers rated their mental and emotional well-being 'below average' or 'very poor'** (only 15% so rated their physical health for the same period). **23% of mothers had no one to talk to** about feelings postpartum.

This intersects with our earlier finding that the overall mental health of respondents (not just postpartum) deteriorated markedly over the 6-month period between April and November 2023. 2024 surveys indicate that emotional stress continued at high levels throughout that year.



4. FAMILY CONFLICT

- **The top 3 things needed to reduce family conflict would be: lower levels of worry/stress (35%);** knowing that the household could pay **housing (19%);** and being able to **meet child social/emotional needs (19%).**

CONCLUSIONS

Pressures on young families are high and growing, including both immediate concerns about **rising prices, increasing debt,** putting **food** on the table daily, more existential or long-term **concerns** about **weather and health emergencies** on the horizon, and **whether to stay** in Houston or relocate.

Mental health of both parents and kids suffers under these and other strains, with **kids needing extra consolation** during catastrophes and **parents burdened with the extra concern** of how best to help their kids. **Lack of a network** to talk through problems can itself become a problem for new mothers negotiating the transition into parenthood.

QUOTES FROM PARENTS IN HARRIS COUNTY

"We are spending less extravagantly and spending less. We are not taking time for ourselves, mental health is being affected."

"We are making more than ever before and struggling more than ever before. We can't buy anything more than the bare essentials. It's depressing and exhausting."

"Beryl made me question the long-term prospect of living in Houston. This was only a category 1 hurricane and the power grid could not cope."

"I was pregnant during Hurricane Beryl and I was very stressed due to the heat."

"Quede muchos días sin luz y sin comida." [*I was left for many days without light and without food*]

"I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety during the pregnancy."

"We slept in our car for 8 of the 10 days without power. ... a very scary time."