



# RAPID-Harris County Data Update

## RAPID-HARRIS COUNTY

The RAPID Survey Project 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, since March 2023. 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 both immediate and long-term program and policy decisions.

As of September 2024, 1,125 parents of children aged five and younger contacted through 17 community partners have shared their experiences, highlighting both successes and challenges. The respondents represent a diverse racial and ethnic background: 46.43% identify as Hispanic/Latine, 25.58% as White, 19.16% as Black, and 8.82% as other races or ethnicities.

These parent voices offer a crucial perspective on the needs and concerns of families and will allow policymakers to better serve our community.

### 1. NONPARENTAL CHILD CARE (NPCC) USE PATTERNS

Of those who reported using NPCC in May 2024, 56% reported using Center-Based Care, 20% reported using paid Family, Friends and Neighbors (FFN), 36% reported using unpaid FFN (some use multiple forms). While proportions vary across surveys, grandparents consistently supply the bulk of relative care.

*This disadvantages families without grandparents nearby (including immigrants from other countries and states) or with grandparents with health issues or other obligations. In Harris County, 42% of children 0-5 have immigrant parents.*



Of parents who use family, friends and neighbors for care, 65% reported relying on grandparents.

### 2. MATERIAL HARDSHIP

The percentage of households that reported facing material hardship increased across the survey period, from 39% to 57%. Parents pointed to hardships around food (up 24%) and utilities (up 31%) most notably, with 92% observing food prices rising through May 2024, while transportation, household items, and housing

costs were also up for many.

The rise in utility hardship was driven by high costs for electricity, affecting 86% of those experiencing that hardship, with phone and water costs also causing difficulties for 42% and 35%, respectively.

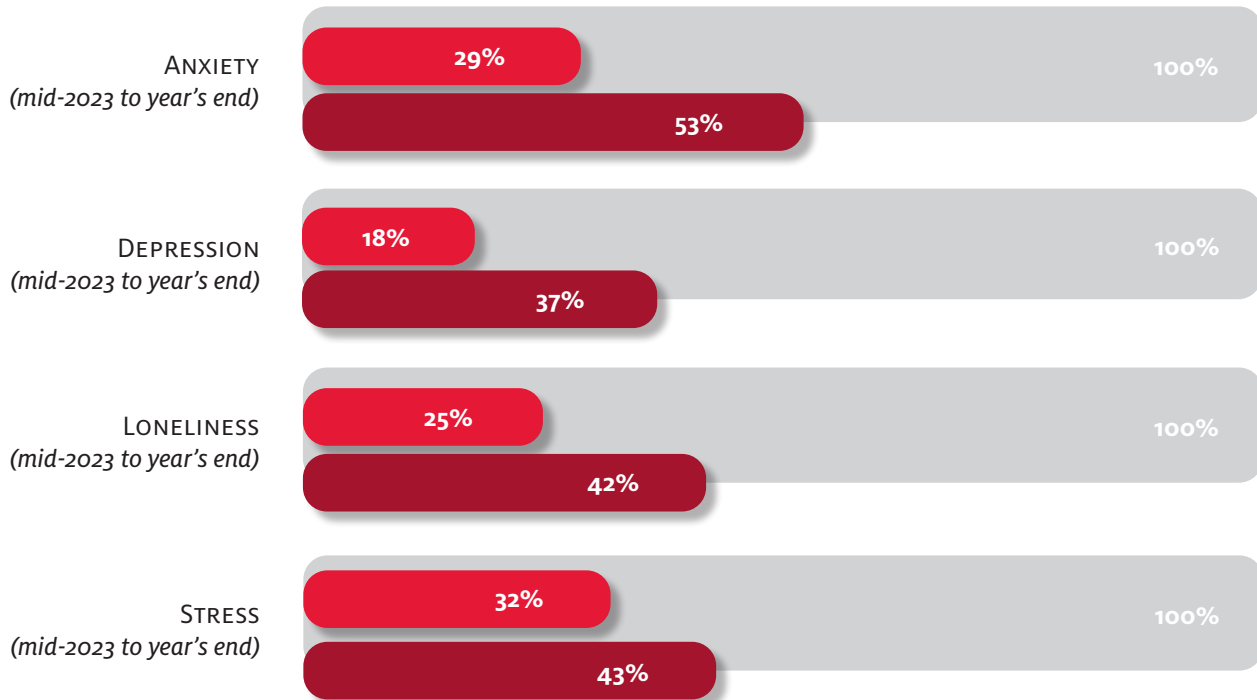


Of families, 86% reported having difficulty paying electricity bills.

### 3. MENTAL HEALTH

Responses over time show a distinct worsening of mental health among caregivers (largely mothers) of children 0-5 over a 6-month period (mid-2023 to year's end). All four symptoms studied show marked negative effects.

The increase in material hardship noted above might be a factor, as might other social stressors affecting young families.



### CONCLUSIONS

Recent **inflation** affected many families, especially food and utilities. The demand for electricity drove the utility burden, which will likely stay high as the climate changes. That hardship and other social factors may have affected the **worsening mental health** of young mothers over the survey period. Nonetheless, many parents were able to utilize child care to work, enabling them to better deal with rising prices.

Among those who depended on FFN for child care, most called upon grandparents to help. Since family care is often used by those unable to afford center-based care, the **high dependence of lower-income parents on their children's grandparents for care points to a need for affordable center-based care to meet the needs of the large population of immigrants with children in the Houston region—from other countries and other states.**

### QUOTES FROM PARENTS IN HARRIS COUNTY

"The financial aid I receive for child care is an enormous help. WIC benefits I receive for my daughter are also a great help."

"My mother, who takes care of my kids, is not in the best health condition and may not be able to help as much, which means I might need to work less, lowering our income."

"Early Reach program [is] paying for child care for me. I prayed so much to be approved .... My baby is thriving and learning while I am at work."

"Our electric bill keeps going up despite how high we try to keep the AC to save on electricity. The house gets hot and the kids get so overwhelmed. Cost of food is ridiculously high as well."

"Food and paying utilities [are my biggest challenges]. Five kids 10 and under who are hungry and going all the time makes it so hard."