

HOUSEHOLD ENERGY INSECURITY SURVEY



Winter 2021-2022



ENERGY JUSTICE LAB
INDIANA UNIVERSITY



Household Energy Insecurity Survey

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About the survey

The Household Energy Insecurity Survey measures the prevalence of energy insecurity among a nationally-representative sample of low-income households (households with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line) in the United States. The survey was administered to a sample of 1,000 respondents, and includes questions about household energy insecurity, household composition and dwelling characteristics, and strategies American families use to manage their energy consumption and cope with energy-related materials hardships.

This survey was administered online in January 2022 and pertains to conditions experienced between November 2021 and January 2022, a three-month winter time space. The survey was administered on behalf of the Indiana University research team by YouGov, a private polling and market research firm. The survey has a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

For more information, please contact the Principal Investigators for this study: Sanya Carley (scarley@indiana.edu) or David Konisky (dkonisky@indiana.edu).

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About the Energy Justice Lab

The [Energy Justice Lab](#) at Indiana University is a research group conducting studies about the equity and justice dimensions of the clean energy transition. Through research, the lab offers insights on what energy justice means as it relates to the energy transition and what individuals and communities on the frontlines are facing, what vulnerability means in the energy justice context, what types of policies and programs are in place to address these issues, and how well government is doing to protect vulnerable communities. Professors [Sanya Carley](#) and [David Konisky](#) serve as Co-Directors of the Energy Justice Lab.



Energy insecurity in the United States

Energy insecurity, or the inability to meet one's energy needs, is a widespread and growing problem among low-income households in the United States. When households are unable to pay their energy bills or are disconnected from their utility service, they may struggle to keep their home at a comfortable temperature and often must engage in strategies that can be detrimental to their physical, mental, and financial well-being.

Recognizing that energy insecurity continues to impact and endanger vulnerable populations across the United States, the Household Energy Insecurity Survey regularly measured the prevalence and patterns of energy insecurity among a nationally-representative sample of low-income households. This Winter 2021-2022 survey covers the winter months of November and December 2021, and January 2022, which included periods of severe cold and storms, as well as extremely high prices for natural gas.

Key findings

- Household energy insecurity is prevalent among low-income households in the United States.
- Black and Hispanic households experience higher levels of energy insecurity.
- Energy insecurity is widespread among households with vulnerable populations, especially families with children.
- Households often forgo other basic household needs to pay their energy bills.
- To cope with the expense of energy, households often adjust the temperature in their homes to uncomfortable levels and accumulate utility debt.

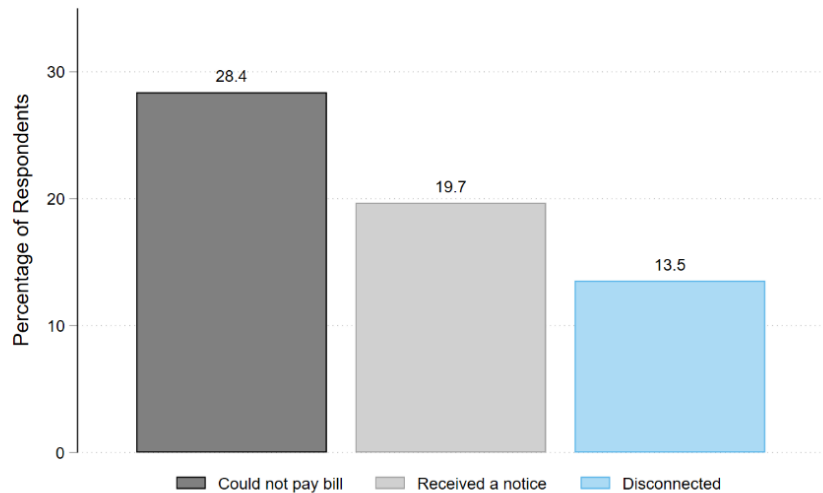


Household energy insecurity is prevalent among low-income households in the United States.

The survey asked respondents whether they were able to pay their energy bill, whether they received a notice of disconnection, and whether their energy services were disconnected by a utility provider over the course of the last three months (November 2021 through January 2022).

More than 28% of respondents reported being unable to pay their energy bill, nearly 20% received a disconnection notice, and 13.5% had their energy service (e.g., electricity, natural gas) disconnected by their utility provider.

Energy Insecurity Last Three Months (November 2021 - January 2022)

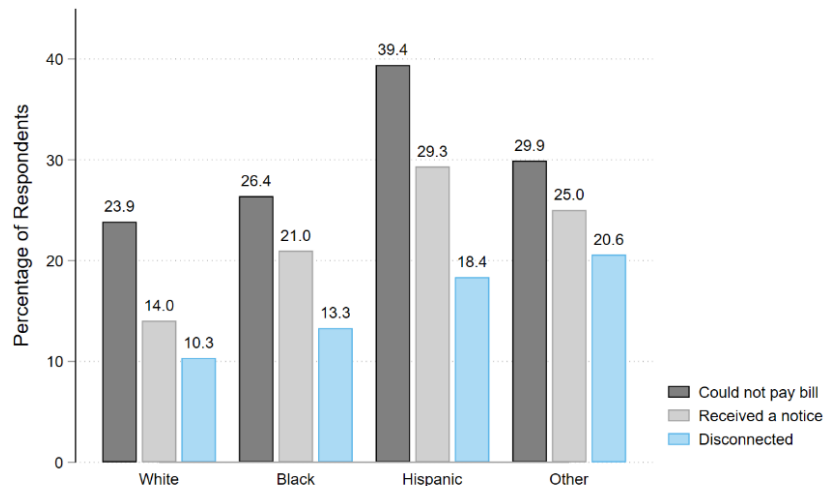


Black and Hispanic households experience higher levels of energy insecurity

From November 2021 through January 2022, almost 40% of Hispanic respondents and more than 26% of Black respondents were not able to pay an energy bill. Hispanic households were about 50% more likely than white households to report being unable to pay an energy bill during this period.

In addition, 29% of Hispanic respondents and 21% of Black respondents received a disconnection notice, and more than 18% of Hispanic respondents and 13% of Black respondents had their energy service disconnected by their utility provider. Compared to white respondents, Hispanic and Black respondents were 80% and 30%, respectively, more likely to have their service disconnected by their utility provider.

Energy Insecurity by Race Last Three Months (November 2021 - January 2022)

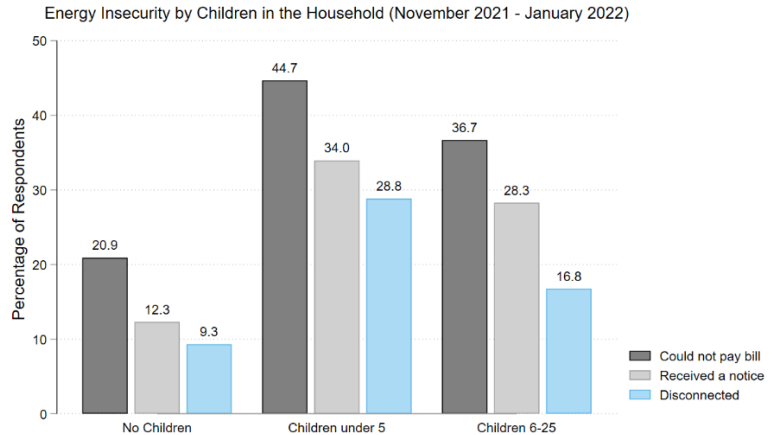




Energy insecurity is widespread among households with vulnerable populations, especially families with children

From November 2021 through January 2022, nearly 45% of households with children younger than 5 years old in the household could not pay an energy bill, 34% received a disconnection notice, and 29% were disconnected from their utility service.

For those with children in the household between the ages of 6 and 17 years old, nearly 37% could not pay their bill, 26% received a notice, and 17% were shut off by their utility.



Other vulnerable households also experienced high rates of energy insecurity; 31% of households with a disability could not pay a bill and 12% had their service disconnected by their utility provider. For households with a member over the age of 65, 27% could not pay their bill and 13% were disconnected.

Households often forgo other basic household needs to pay their energy bills.

More than 21% of respondents reported that, between November 2021 and January 2022, they had to forgo basic household expenses like food or medical care to afford their energy bill “on multiple occasions” (15%) or “all the time” (6%).

About 37% of respondents indicated that they had to either give up energy needs to afford other expenses or had to give up other expenses in order to afford their household energy bill. Approximately 33% of respondents reported that they reduced their energy consumption “Most of the time” (19%) or “Always” (14%) in order to save money on their energy bill.

To cope with the expense of energy, households often adjust the temperature in their homes to uncomfortable levels and accumulate utility debt.

From November 2021 through January 2022, 14% of respondents reported that they never had a comfortable temperature in their home and 30% reported only having a comfortable temperature in their home some of the time.

Around 38% of respondents reported having some level of utility debt, and the average level of debt was \$129.