

# **Survey of Household Energy Insecurity in Indiana in Time of COVID**

Preliminary Results of Wave-1

June 30, 2020

## **Energy Insecurity in the United States**

Energy insecurity, the inability to meet your energy demands or pay your energy bills, is a pervasive problem among low-income households in Indiana. When families cannot afford to keep their lights on or homes at comfortable temperatures, their mental and physical well-being is more likely to suffer, especially in households with young children and disabled individuals. Prior to 2020, energy insecurity was expected to worsen due to the adoption of energy policies that will likely increase electricity prices, coupled with the increased incidences of heat waves and cold spells resulting from climate change that lead to surges in energy demand.

Now, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge for low-income populations, especially energy insecure Indiana households. As unemployment continues to rise and protections fade or disappear, many will have little to no social safety net. Much of this population already lives paycheck to paycheck; therefore, this sudden lack of income will make it difficult to afford monthly expenses, including rent, groceries, and energy bills. Moreover, as people continue to stay at home through the hot summer months, they will need energy for essential services, including air conditioning, refrigeration, cooking, and powering electronic and medical devices. The combination of increasing energy demands with a reduction in income will likely exacerbate low-income Hoosiers' energy burden and move a whole new population of households into energy insecurity.

## **The Survey of Household Energy Insecurity in Time of COVID**

The survey was administered to a representative sample of Indiana households at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. The survey was administered online from April 30 through June 2, 2020 on behalf of an Indiana University research team, by YouGov, a private polling and market research firm. The survey was taken by 2,000 respondents, and responses have a margin of error of about 2%. It included questions about energy expenses, household energy behavior, and activities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Summary of Key Findings

Among Indiana households responding to the Survey of Household Energy Insecurity in Time of COVID:

- 15% indicated that they could not pay an energy bill during the prior month, 13% received a shutoff notice, and 4% had their service disconnected.
- 30% indicated that they had to reduce or forgo expenses for basic household needs, such as medicine or food, to pay an energy bill.
- Over 21% of households with income at or below the poverty line did not pay their energy bill last month, compared to 15% of households with income between 100-150% FPL, and 9% of households with income between 150-200% FPL.
- Households not paying their energy bill last month are more likely to be: at or below poverty line, people of color, households with children under 5 years of age, households with at least one person age 65 and older, households with one or more people with a disability, households with someone requiring use of an electronic medical device, and in households where someone either lost their job or had their hours reduced since the COVID-19 pandemic.

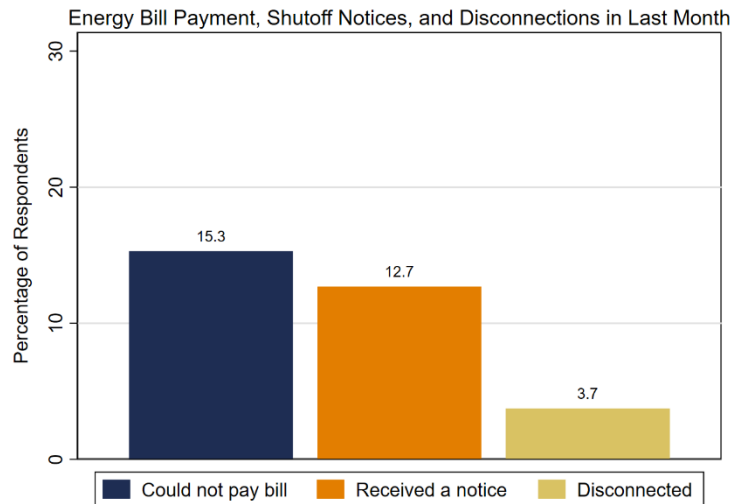
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 31% of respondents indicated negative job experiences as a result of the pandemic: 11% had lost their jobs, 13% had their hours reduced, and 7% were furloughed without pay.
- 13% of respondents lost their health insurance and an additional 7% had their health insurance benefits reduced.
- Over 15% of respondents indicated that they were not paying their rent or mortgage at all, and an additional 10% indicated that they were making only partial payments.
- Over 43% of respondents indicated that it had harmed their ability to seek medical care.
- 32% of respondents indicated that it had harmed their ability to feed their family.

## Detailed Results

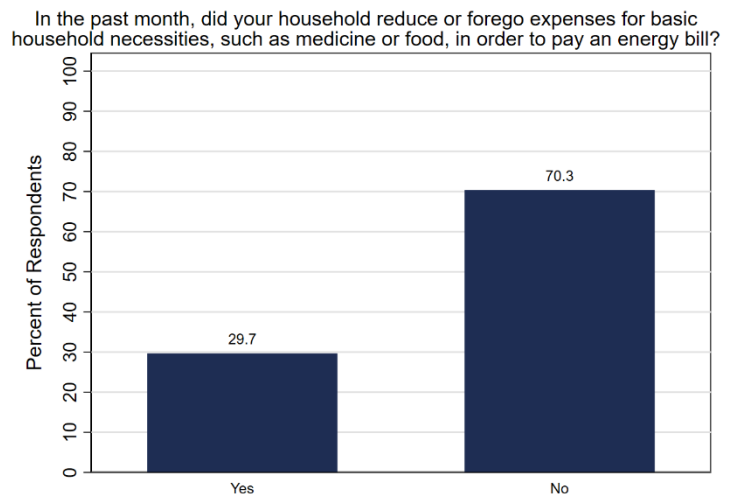
### ***Energy bill payment, shutoff notices, and disconnections***

The survey asked respondents about their ability to pay their energy bill during the last month, as well as whether they had received a shutoff notice and/or had been disconnected from service. About 15% of respondents indicated that they could not pay an energy bill during the prior month, almost 13% received a shutoff notice, and almost 4% had their service disconnected.



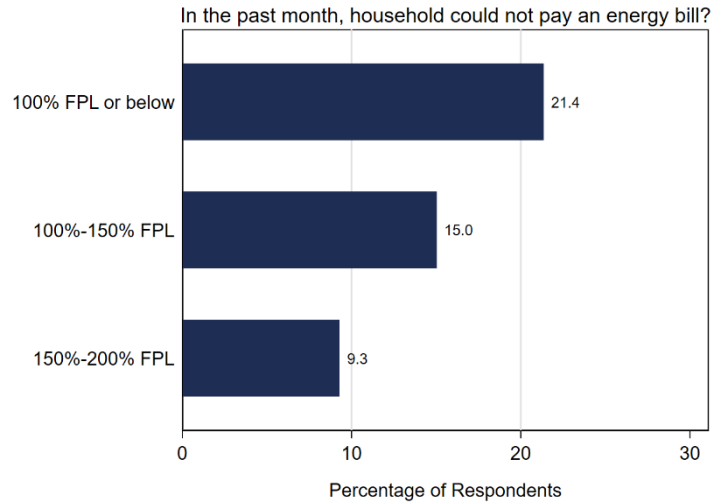
### ***Had to reduce or forgo expenses last month to pay an energy bill***

The survey asked respondents whether their household in the past month had to reduce or forgo expenses for basic household needs, such as medicine or food, to pay an energy bill. Approximately 30% of the households responded that they did have to reduce or forgo other basic needs in the past month to pay their energy bill.



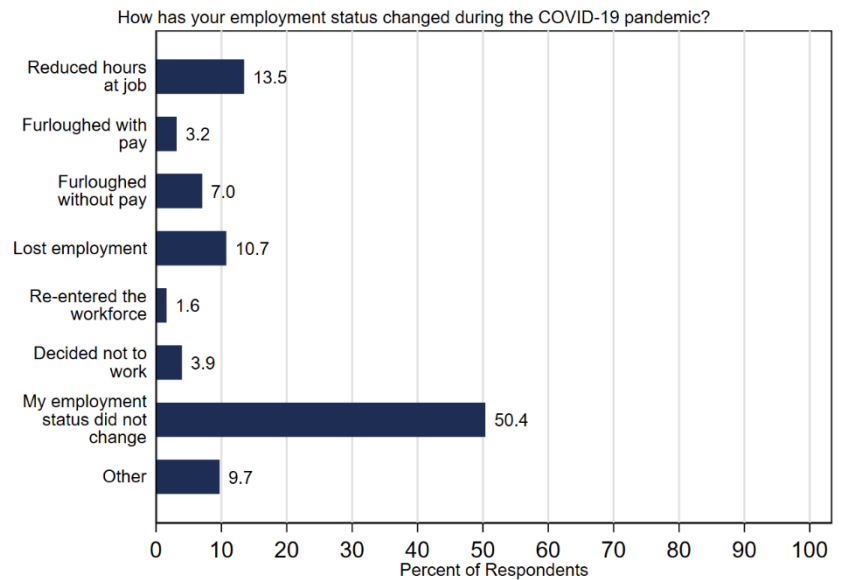
***Income of households not paying energy bill last month***

Households with income at or below the poverty line were more likely to be unable to pay their energy bill last month (21%), compared to 15% of households with income between 100-150% FPL, and 9% of households with income between 150-200% FPL.



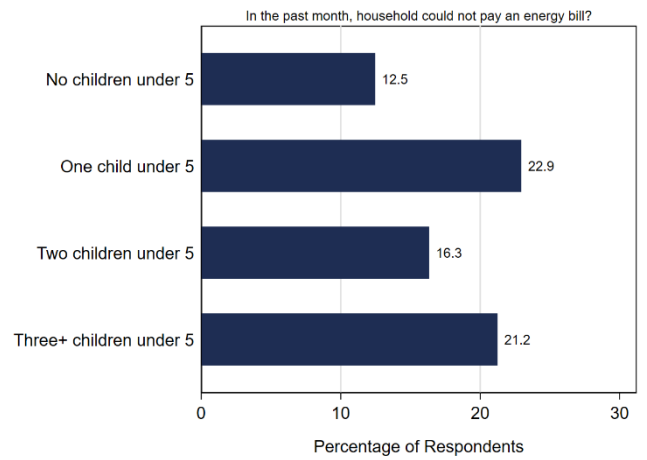
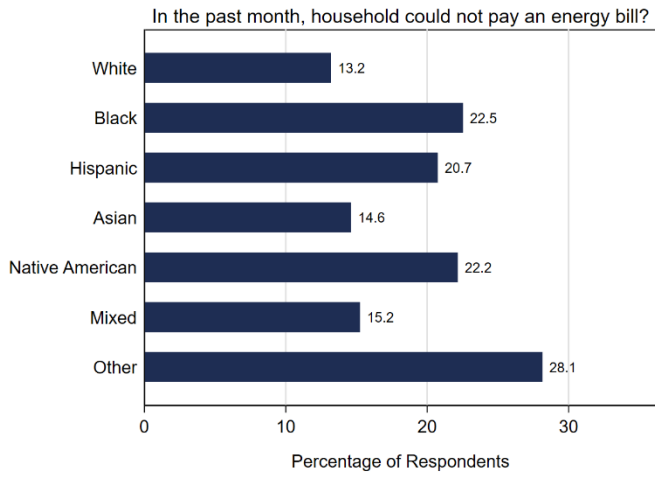
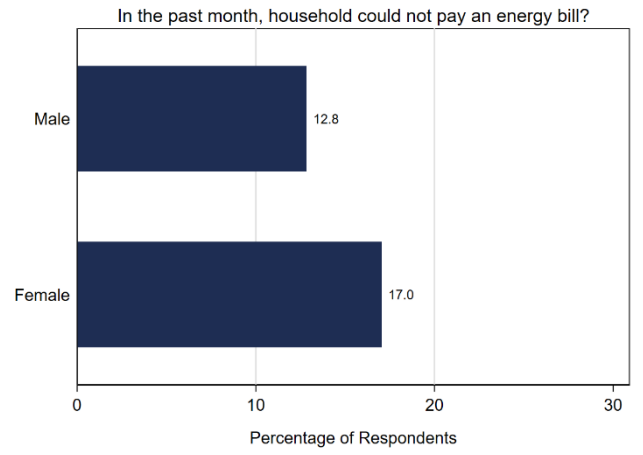
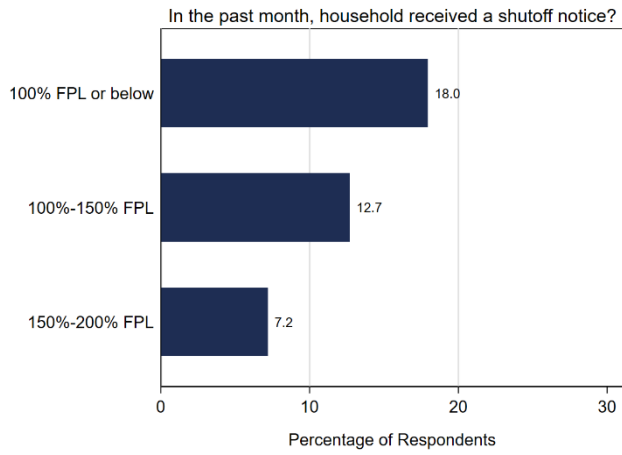
***Employment status during COVID-19 pandemic***

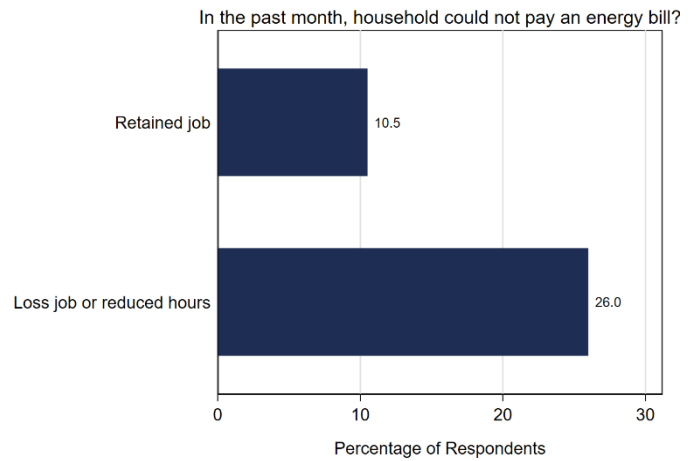
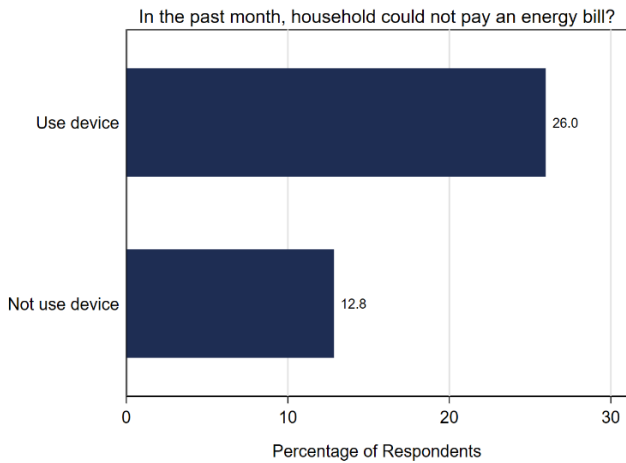
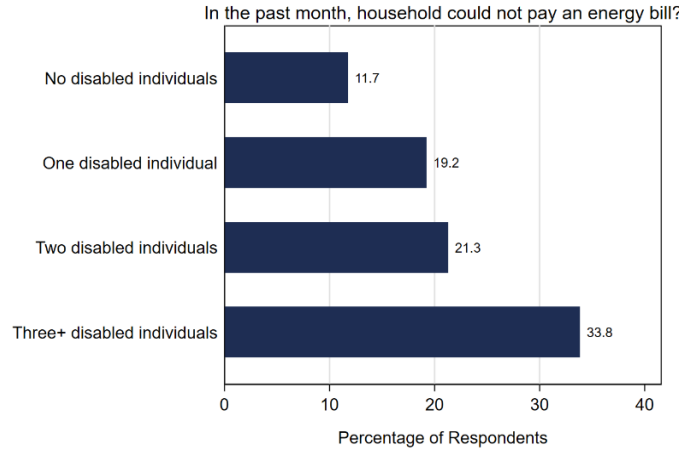
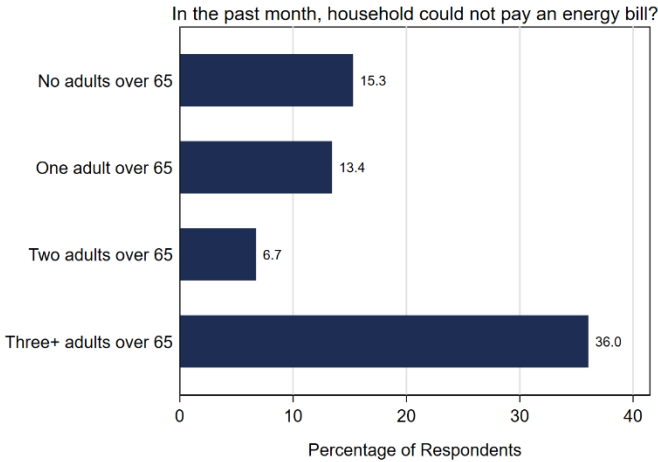
Nearly a third of respondents indicated that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, they had lost their jobs (11%), had their hours reduced (14%), or were furloughed without pay (7%). An additional 3% were furloughed with pay and about 4% noted that they had opted not to work at all.



***At-risk populations***

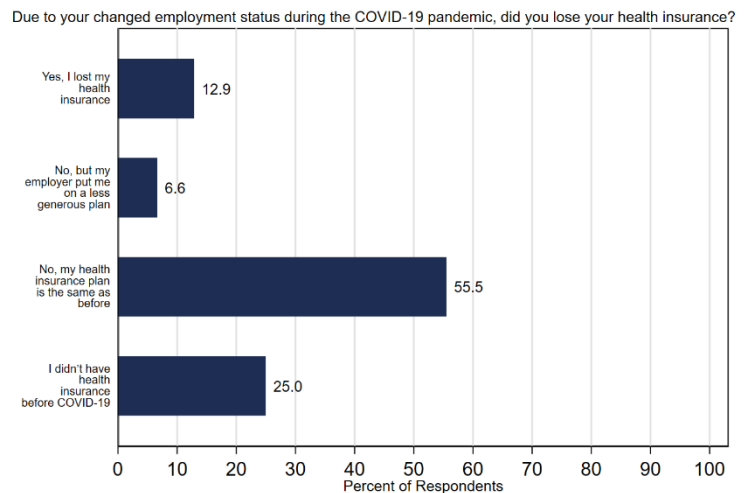
*Households not paying their energy bill last month are more likely to be at or below poverty line, people of color, households with children under 5 years of age, households with at least one person age 65 and older, and households with one or people with a disability, households with someone requiring use of an electronic medical device, and in households where someone either lost their job or had their hours reduced since the COVID-19 pandemic.*





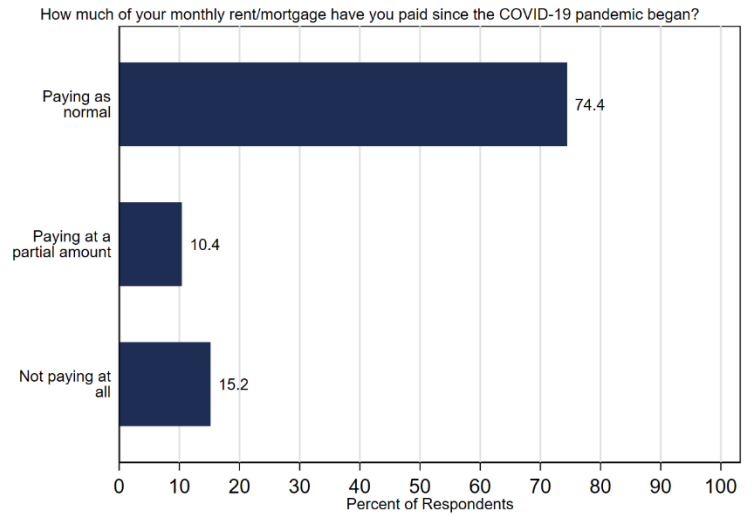
### ***Health insurance loss since start of COVID-19 pandemic***

Approximately 13% of respondents lost their health insurance since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and another 7% had their health insurance benefits reduced. An additional 25% of the respondents did not have health insurance before the pandemic started.



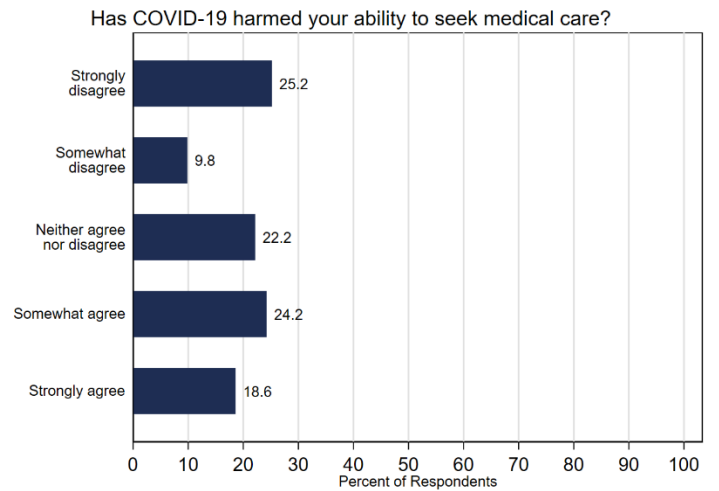
### ***Inability to pay rent or mortgage since start of COVID-19 pandemic***

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, about 15% of respondents indicated that they were not paying their rent or mortgage at all, and an additional 10% indicated that they were making only partial payments.



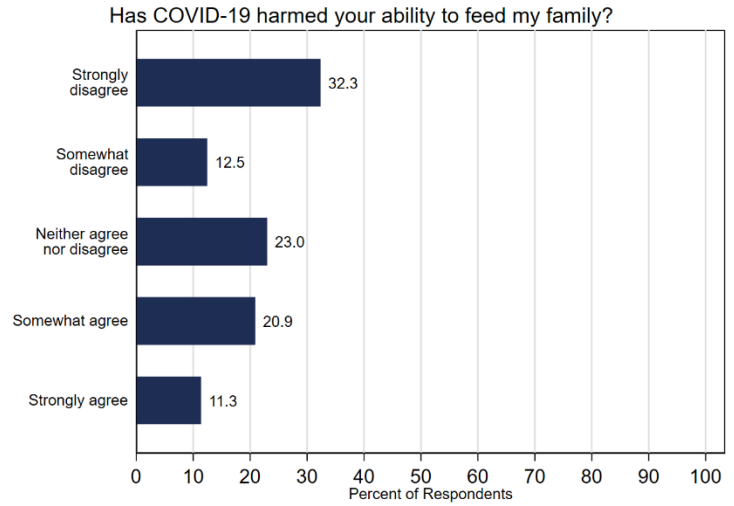
### ***Inability to seek medical care since start of COVID-19 pandemic***

About 43% of respondents agreed with a statement that the COVID-19 pandemic had harmed their ability to seek medical care.



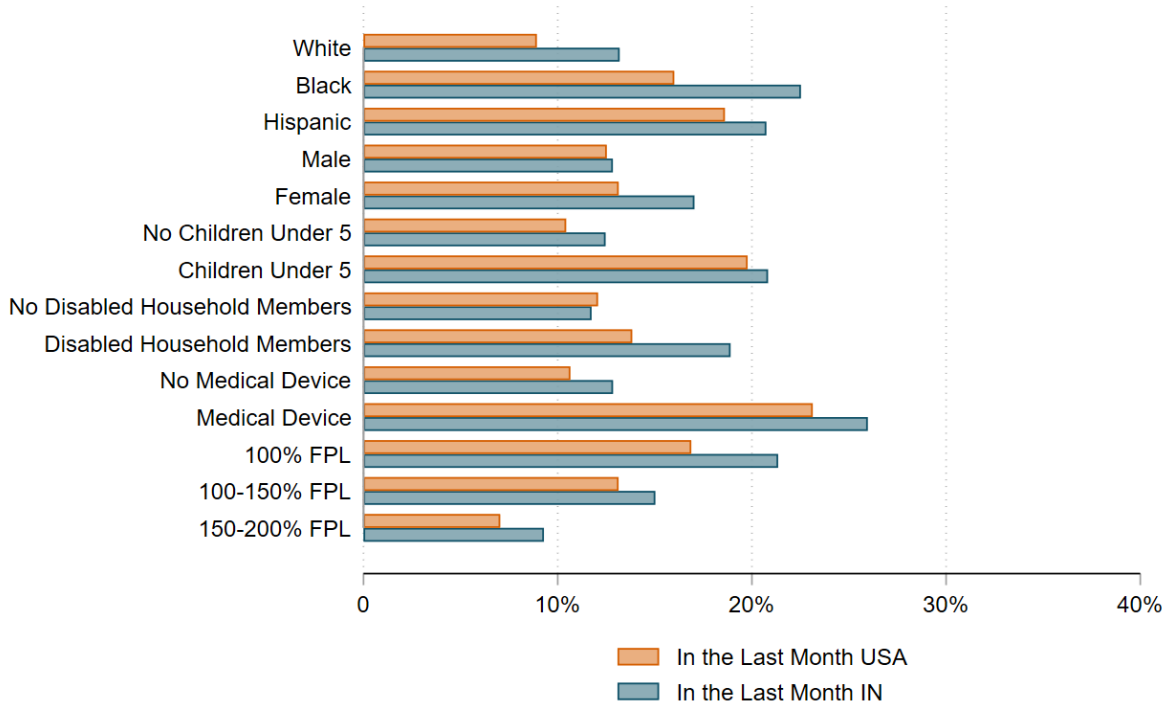
**Inability to feed family since start of COVID-19 pandemic**

Approximately 32% of respondents agreed with a statement that the COVID-19 pandemic had harmed their ability to feed their family.



**Demographic comparison between Indiana and the United States of those not paying energy bill last month**

**Household could not pay an energy bill**





### **About the Research Team**

This study was conducted by a research team at the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, led by principal investigators David Konisky and Sanya Carley. The team studies energy justice issues that relate to the ongoing energy transition in the U.S. and across the world. This research effort was supported by grants provided by Indiana University's Office of the Vice President of Research and the Environmental Resilience Institute. The lead authors can be contacted at [dkonisky@indiana.edu](mailto:dkonisky@indiana.edu) and [scarley@indiana.edu](mailto:scarley@indiana.edu).