



# The Economic and Social Impacts of COVID in Lancaster

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Our project was a multidisciplinary research project co-sponsored by United Way of Lancaster and CSEwL. Specifically, five F&M faculty members were involved: Drs. Emily Marshall (Sociology/Public Health), Jennifer Meyer (Political Science/Economics/Public Health), Harriet Okatch (Public Health), Wei-Ting Yen (Political Science), and Jessica Cox (Spanish Applied Linguistics). We also collaborated with Berwood Yost and the Center for Opinion Research at F&M, and with Amer Al-Fayadh and Bruno Cervera of Church World Services / Communication Essentials, LLC.

Our project was a survey of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Lancaster County, because national studies may not capture specific needs at the local level. We met with a total of 12 local community organizations to learn more about their interests and needs, as well as the needs of the communities they serve, to inform the survey that we wrote. We then surveyed a representative sample of the county at two time points: in Fall 2020, 2,094 respondents completed the survey and in Spring 2021, 952 completed a follow-up survey to see how their situation had changed over time. Because certain minoritized populations, such as people who prefer languages other than English, are often under-represented in survey research and may experience distinct impacts of the pandemic, we also surveyed a purposive sample of 61 multicultural individuals (Dec. 2020 - June 2021). Overall, topics on the survey included COVID-19 knowledge, perceptions, and behavior; childcare; job and income loss; employment; stress; demographics; and remote instruction of English classes for adults.

Briefly, overarching findings show that some populations in Lancaster County felt the social and economic impacts of the pandemic more severely than others did. For example, in Fall 2020, 38% of households surveyed reported some type of income loss; Latinx households were significantly more likely to report job loss than other demographic groups. Younger people and those who identified as female or non-binary gender were more likely to report elevated stress levels than were those who were older or male. Because majority-language proficiency is associated with economic and health

outcomes, we asked individuals with intermediate or lower English proficiency their opinions about remote English classes. Participants indicated strong interest in future online English classes and classes that included instruction on how to use new technologies, despite also reporting potential barriers to attending such classes, like work schedules. Interestingly, the most frequently reported potential barriers were not digital barriers like access to devices or familiarity using them, but rather other commitments like work and caretaking, which have been especially strong demands at that time in the pandemic.

The support of both United Way and CSEwL was essential for connecting us to the community organizations that ensured that this project was informed by and spoke to community needs, not only scholarly research interests. In addition, grant money was instrumental for a project of this size: in particular, for contracting with the Center for Opinion Research for the representative sample, and for contracting with professional language services to ensure appropriate and high-quality translation and interpretation in relevant languages spoken in Lancaster County (which go beyond the languages spoken by the five co-PIs).

In addition to scholarly presentations and publications, analyses of the data collected were shared in a Zoom meeting open to the local public and hosted by United Way in July 2021. Reports are also publicly available on the CSEwL website. Four of the five researchers have presented findings on the Academic Minute, a national public radio segment, and all have been featured in podcasts hosted by CSEwL. The relationships established between the F&M researchers and community partners have also led to additional collaborations, such as guest lectures by community partners in F&M classes, and consultation in both directions on recent projects. We look forward to continuing to work together on new endeavors in the future.