

## Relationships with Employment

*Employment was found to be protective in some key ways:*

- Employed respondents had less trouble obtaining medication and were less likely to change their living situation.
- At the same time, being employed elevated the chances for exposure to COVID-19.
- Employed respondents also experienced more changes in sleep patterns and eating habits.

## The Impact of Disparities

*Social determinants such as race and education impact ability to work:*

- People with a higher education were working while those with less education found themselves without a job.
- Black/African American respondents were found to be greatly impacted, as they were less likely to be employed or have formal education when compared to their peers.

# The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health and Well-Being: The Role of Employment

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**This study reports on a survey of adults with current or former mental illnesses to determine how they were faring in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics explored include exposure to coronavirus, experiences with anxiety and depression, lifestyle changes in sleep and dietary patterns, and access to needed health care and medications.**

### Background

The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic is being felt on all aspects of American life. There are widespread reports of increased mental illness as a result of the pandemic and the restrictions needed to mitigate its impact. A recent series of surveys found that anxiety and depressive disorders increased considerably in the U.S. from April to June 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.\* These symptoms are disproportionately affecting people already receiving treatment for pre-existing psychiatric conditions, along with youth and people of color. Research is still being conducted on how COVID-19 has disrupted American's health routines, but early evidence suggests a mixed response. While some health practices have improved, others such as healthy eating, sleep, and accessing health care have been disrupted. Given their higher risk for emotional and physical health disparities, it is anticipated that adults with mental illnesses are experiencing these same impacts, with added burdens due to health, racial, and economic disparities in this group.

To our knowledge, no surveys have yet been conducted regarding how COVID-19 has affected both mental wellness and healthy lifestyle routines among adults in recovery from mental illnesses. Surveys also have not been published about reported resiliency and positive coping among these individuals. Since many respondents are both recipients and providers of peer and other mental health services, we were interested in the impact of employment on their experience of the virus and its related restrictions.

### Results

Results indicated that employment status was associated with responses to the pandemic and risk of viral transmission. Being employed increased the chances for COVID-19 exposure ( $p < .04$ ). Employed respondents reported changes in sleeping patterns ( $p < .04$ ) and eating habits ( $p < .001$ ) related to COVID-19. When compared to unemployed individuals, employed individuals were more likely to have access to their medications ( $p < .01$ ), as well as more stable living arrangements ( $p < .01$ ). Survey results suggest that social determinants of health, such as race and education, impacted ability to work. With regard to race ( $p < .01$ ) and employment, significantly fewer Black individuals reported working; individuals with lower levels of education also were significantly less likely to report working ( $p < .001$ ).

### RACE & EDUCATION

#### Race

- Black/African American n=72
- White n=143
- Asian n=9
- Native American n=1
- Latinx n=35
- Other n=32

#### Education

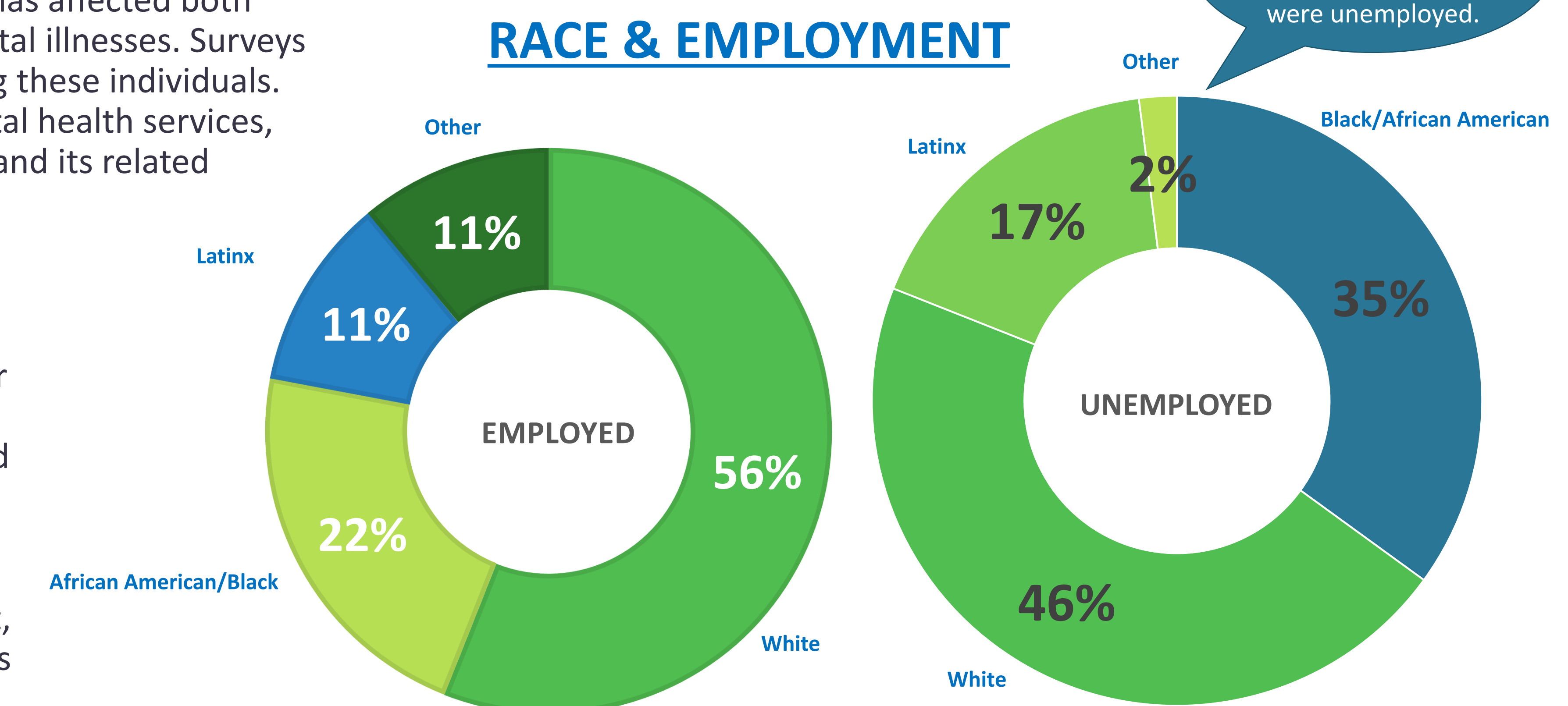
- High school or less n=65
- Some college n=59
- At least college grad n=133

### Methods

This survey was conducted with N=272 individuals with mental illness from community mental health programs in New Jersey (n=190) and New York state (n=82). Individuals were recruited via email and web announcements and asked to voluntarily participate in a brief survey related to how the pandemic was affecting their daily lives.

The web survey assessed self-reported COVID-19-related changes in their community status (e.g., employment, living arrangement), mental wellness, daily routines, risk of COVID-19 infection, access to health care, and demographic information (e.g., race, gender identity).

In our sample, 155 (57%) identified as female, 98 (36%) as male, 1 (0.4%) as gender non-binary, and 3 (1%) as transgender. They ranged in age from 21 to 80 years old. Approximately 27% identified as Black/African American, 53% as White, 13% as Latinx, and 12% as other ethnicities. Overall, 65% were employed and 52% were college graduates.



### Conclusions

The pandemic and regulations to mitigate it have vastly changed life and the way our society functions, presenting us with new challenges and obstacles. Our survey suggests the important role that employment plays in helping people with mental illnesses as they meet the challenges presented by the pandemic, along with some of the disruptions that they are experiencing when working. Psychosocial rehabilitation, peer support, and other services will be critically important as people with mental illnesses rebuild their lives post-COVID. Special attention to the impact of the social determinants of health and racial disparities will be critically important in ensuring that all people with mental illnesses experience equity in their recovery and vocational journeys.

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