

Exclusive: Study shows demographics were the largest predictor of stability during Covid economic tumult

Demographics such as race, ethnicity, and whether New Yorkers live in single-parent households have a direct relation to generational poverty and how it changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a new study.

The study, released Tuesday by Utica University and health care revenue management software-as-a-service firm FinThrive, shows how income in neighborhoods across the state grew between 2019-2021 and how that is connected to demographics. It found that even in households near each other within neighborhoods, peoples' economic experience of the pandemic was vastly different as jobs were lost or gained.

It also found that Black and Hispanic New Yorkers as well as single-parent households were more economically at-risk during those years, said Brian Urban, FinThrive's head of payer segment marketing.

"No matter how much stimulus [Black and Hispanic people] will receive, more credit is being used," he said. "If you are a single-parent home, you are more at-risk for maintaining the

same job [and] maintaining assets."

In Utica, in Oneida County, both 2019 and 2021 income data shows that peoples' income was increasing less in the center city and more on the suburban fringes, according to the study. Meanwhile, in large apartment buildings in Manhattan, multimillionaires were found to be "colder"—as in, they were losing some money during Covid—while New Yorkers with even higher incomes were "hotter," making money during the pandemic.

Overall, researchers found that while the pandemic was difficult financially across New York, regardless of income change, peoples' race and which neighborhoods they live in are direct determinants of economic stability, which is one of the hardest things to change and a part of life that has the most impact on health outcomes. Government stimulus alone, the study found, is not enough to lift people out of generational poverty or help them achieve upward mobility.

Urban said this economic information could

have broad implications for health care providers, as the study found indicators of generational poverty in neighborhoods where it wasn't previously seen. Patients' socioeconomic circumstances have traditionally been invisible to providers, he added.

"[It's] a really clear sign that there are areas that need investment, whether it's from a mobile unit for health care or public health services, for payment assistance or financial assistance, or social services that need to be better connected with communities," Urban said. "It really kind of highlights the areas that need investment help."

Going forward, Utica researchers will expand their analysis to include North Carolina, Arizona, California, Virginia and Texas.

Utica University enrolls about 3,000 undergraduates in Utica. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, whose Health Data for Action program funded the study, is based in Princeton, N.J., while FinThrive is based in Alpharetta, Georgia. —J.N.

