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THE COVID STATES PROJECT: A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY REPORT #84: COVID-19 DEATHS AND DEPRESSION

USA, April 2022

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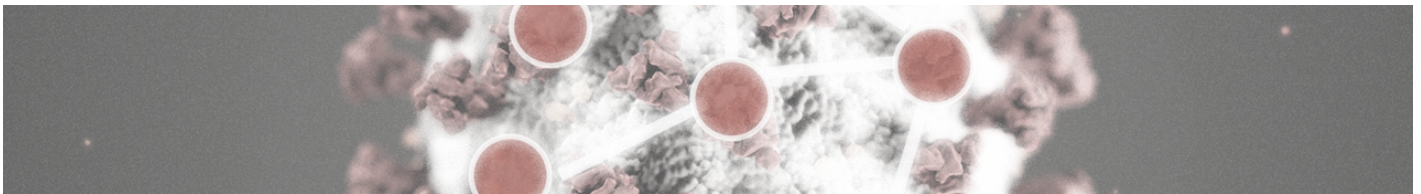
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Report of April 21, 2022, v.1

The COVID States Project

From: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States

A joint project of:

Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

Authors: Roy H. Perlis (Harvard Medical School); Jon Green (Northeastern University); Zhen Guo (Northeastern University); Alauna C. Safarpour (Harvard University); Katherine Ognyanova (Rutgers University); David Lazer (Northeastern University); Matthew A. Baum (Harvard University); James Druckman (Northwestern University); Mauricio Santillana (Harvard Medical School); Hong Qu (Northeastern University); Kristin Lunz Trujillo (Northeastern University); Ata Uslu (Northeastern University); Alexi Quintana (Northeastern University), and Caroline Pippert (Northwestern University)

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Northeastern University
Network Science Institute



COVER MEMO

Summary Memo — April 21, 2022

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Note on methods:

Between March 2, 2022, and April 4, 2022, we surveyed 22,234 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender (for methodological details on the other waves, see covidstates.org). In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics to match the U.S. population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas. This was the latest in a series of surveys we have been conducting since April 2020, examining attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19 in the United States.

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Or visit us at www.covidstates.org.

COVID-19 deaths and depression

The number of deaths associated with COVID-19 in the United States is approaching the grim milestone of [1 million people](#), or around 1 in 330 people. In many communities, this number is far higher.

The magnitude of these losses—and their impact on the survivors—can be difficult to comprehend. A recent White House [memorandum](#) acknowledges this impact as a key consideration as the nation seeks to recover: “Each soul is irreplaceable, and the families and communities left behind are still reeling from profound loss.”

To better understand this impact, the COVID-19 States Project surveyed 18,103 adults from all 50 U.S. States and the District of Columbia in March 2022. We asked them whether they knew anyone who died of COVID-19, and whether they were family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, or acquaintances. To understand the emotional impact of these losses, we also asked about symptoms of depression using a 9-item questionnaire (the [Patient Health Questionnaire](#)) commonly used to identify major depression in primary care settings. In prior waves, we found that rates of depression in the U.S. were 3-4 times greater than the roughly [8% in adults](#) seen prior to COVID-19.

KEY FINDINGS

- 4 out of 10 American adults know at least one person who died of COVID-19, including 7% who know 3 or more people who died.
- 15% of American adults report that a family member died of COVID-19.
- Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than others to know someone who died of COVID-19 (46% and 45%, respectively, versus 38% for White and 36% for Asian respondents).
- About 1 in 4 U.S. adults (27%) report moderate or greater symptoms of depression, generally similar to rates throughout the pandemic.

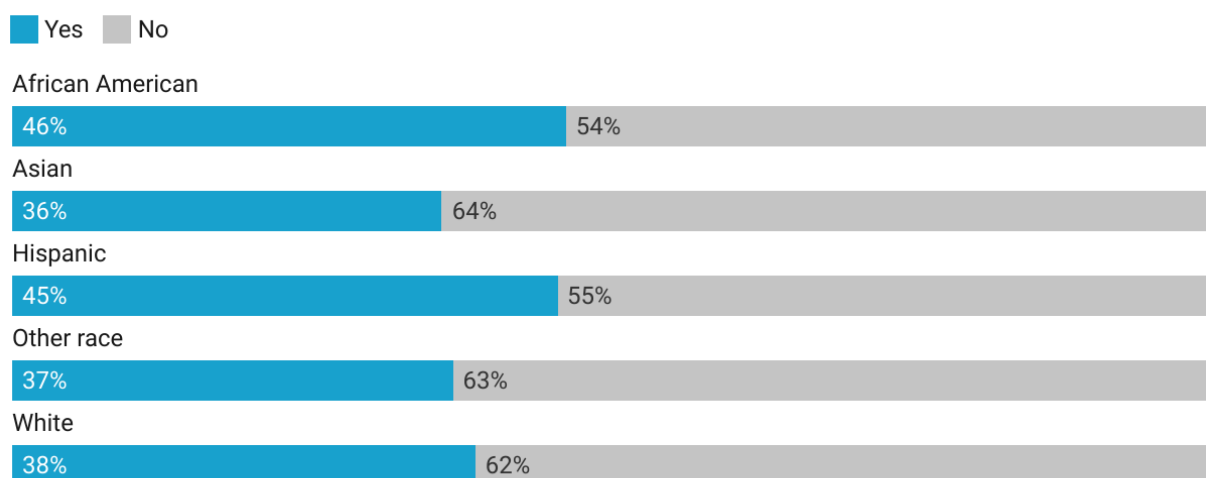
- These rates of depression are highest among those 18-24, lowest among those 65 and older.
- Rates of depression vary substantially by state, from a low of 20% to a high of 32%. They remain highest among those who identify politically as Independents, followed by Democrats and then Republicans.
- Among those with a family member who died, rates of depression were 31% compared to 26% among those without a family member who died; these effects were not explained by differences in age, gender, race and ethnicity, income, or U.S. region.
- There are two hopeful observations in our data. First, while rates of depression remain higher among adults in households with children compared to those without, this difference has progressively diminished, and is now less than 5%.
- Second, rates of suicidal thoughts have steadily diminished since May 2021, although nearly 1 in 5 adults (19%) still reports such thoughts.

1. COVID-19 deaths among family, friends, and acquaintances

Overall, 40% of adults in our survey knew at least one person who died of COVID-19. One in five adults (20%) knew one person, 13% knew two people, and 7% knew three people or more who died from the coronavirus. Of individuals who knew at least one person who died from COVID-19, 15% lost a family member, 18% lost a friend, 4% lost a neighbor, 4% lost a co-worker, and 14% lost an acquaintance.

Consistent with the well-documented trends of the uneven impact of the pandemic, our survey finds clear racial differences in who reported knowing someone who died from the virus. Black and Hispanic adults were more likely than White and Asian adults to know someone who died from COVID-19: 46% of Black adults and 45% of Hispanic adults knew someone who died, versus 38% of Whites and 36% of Asians. (9% of Black and 9% of Hispanic adults reported knowing 3 or more people who died, compared to 5% of Whites and 6% of Asians).

Proportion who know at least one person who died of COVID-19 (by race)

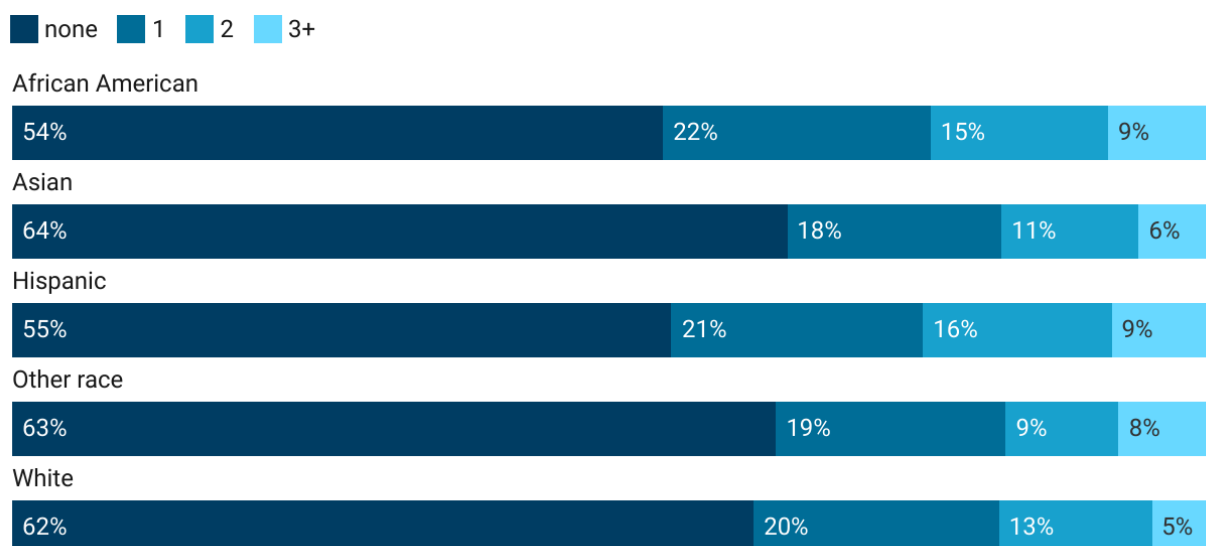


N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1.

How many people did you know who died of COVID-19? By race



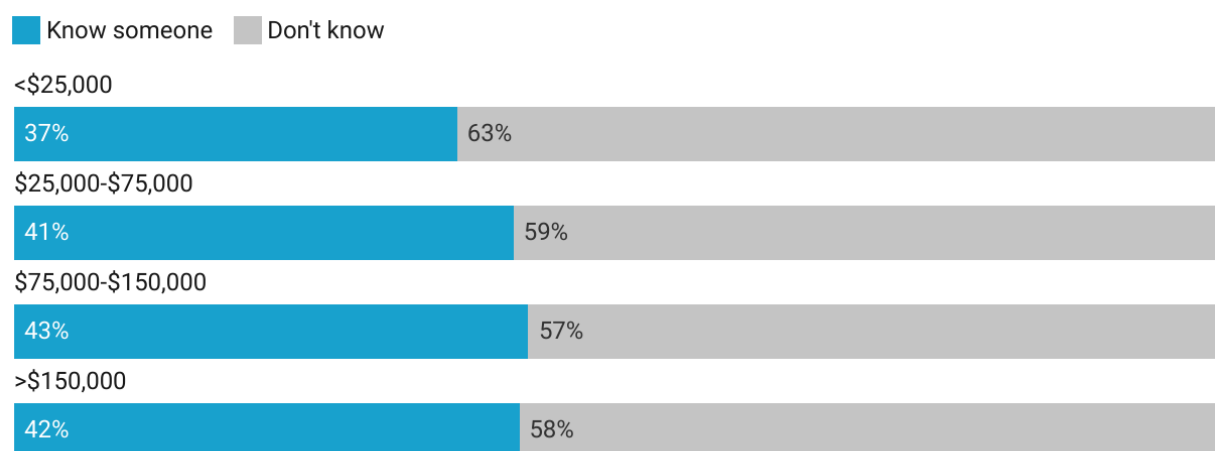
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Figure 2.

While the impact of COVID-19 on lower-income Americans is well-documented, we did not see a clear pattern of association here, either for deaths overall or deaths of family members. The lowest-income groups had the lowest rates of death (37%, compared to 41-43% for all other income groups). Groups were similar in terms of deaths of relatives (15-16% for households earning less than \$75,000 per year, versus 13-14% for those earning \$75,000 per year or more.)

Proportion who know at least one person who died of COVID-19 (by income level)



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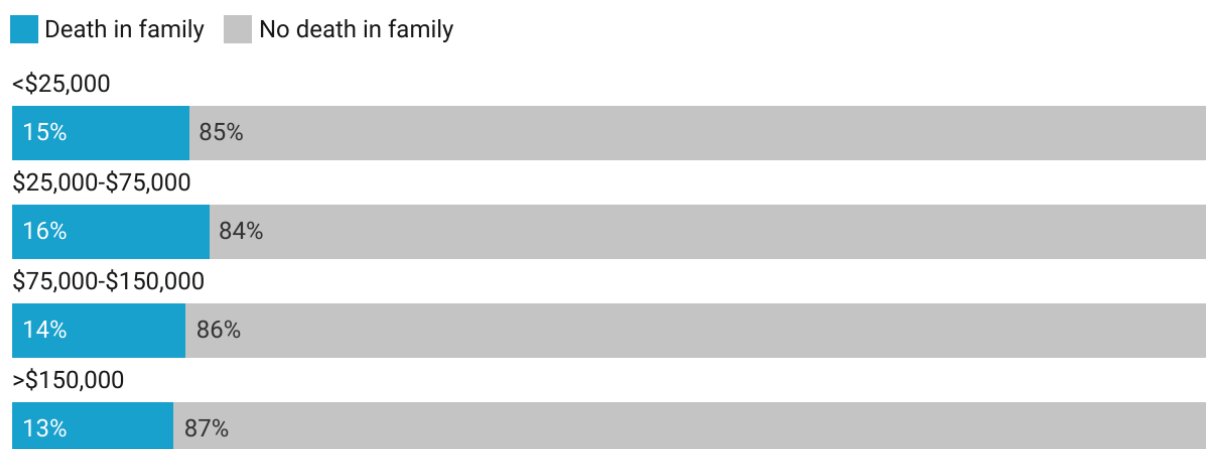
Figure 3.

Rates of exposure to COVID-19 deaths also varied by age, with greatest rates among those 45-64 at 45%, compared to 41% for those 65 and older, 38% for those 25-44, and 35% for those 18-24.

Among those who knew someone who died, the oldest adults were the least likely to report the death of a family member, at 12%, compared to other age groups that ranged from 16-18%.

Women were more likely to report knowing at least one person who died of COVID-19, at 43%, compared to 38% of men.

Proportion who have a family member who died of COVID-19 (by income level)

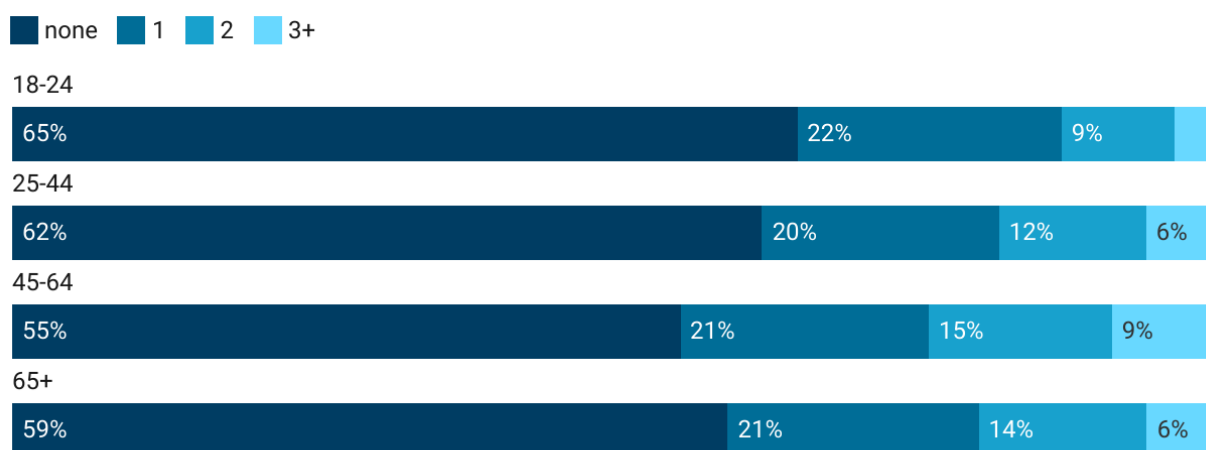


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Figure 4.

How many people did you know who died of COVID-19? By age group

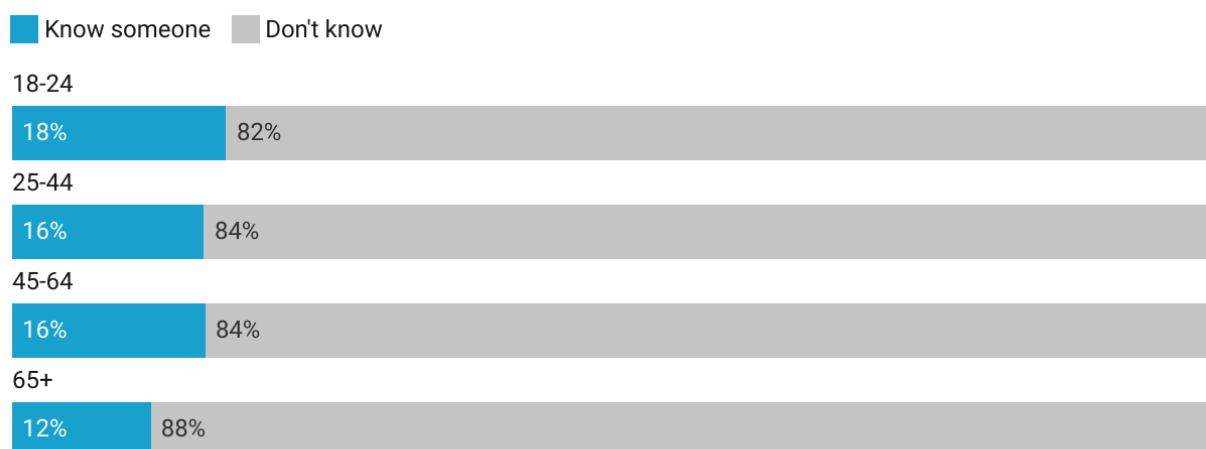


N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 5.

Proportion who have a family member who died of COVID-19 (by age groups)



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Figure 6.

How many people did you know who died of COVID-19? By gender



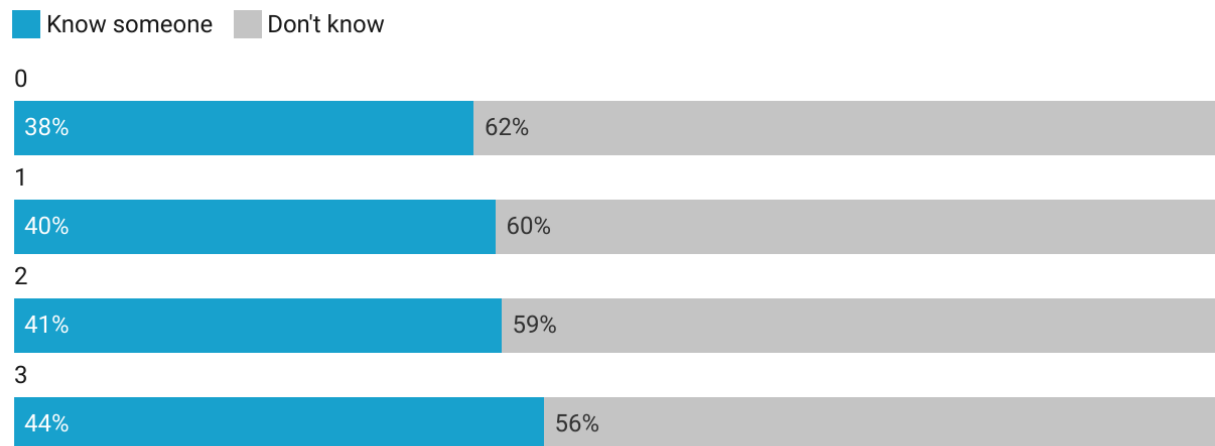
N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 7.

People who lived alone were least likely to report knowing someone who died of COVID, at 38%, compared to 40% of those who live with one other person, 41% with 2 people, and 44% with 3 or more people.

Proportion who know at least one person who died of COVID-19 (by number of people in the household)

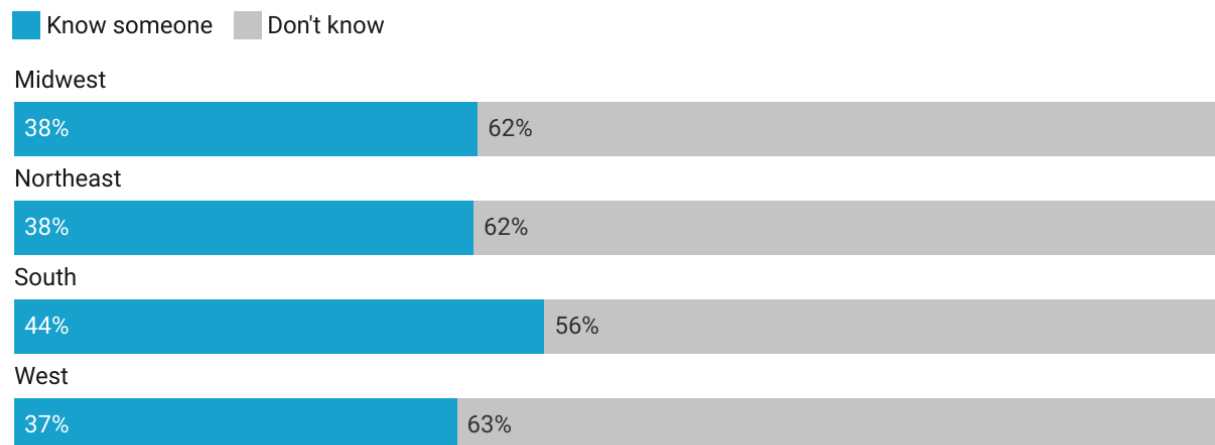


N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8.

Proportion who know at least one person who died of COVID-19 (by geographical region)



N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

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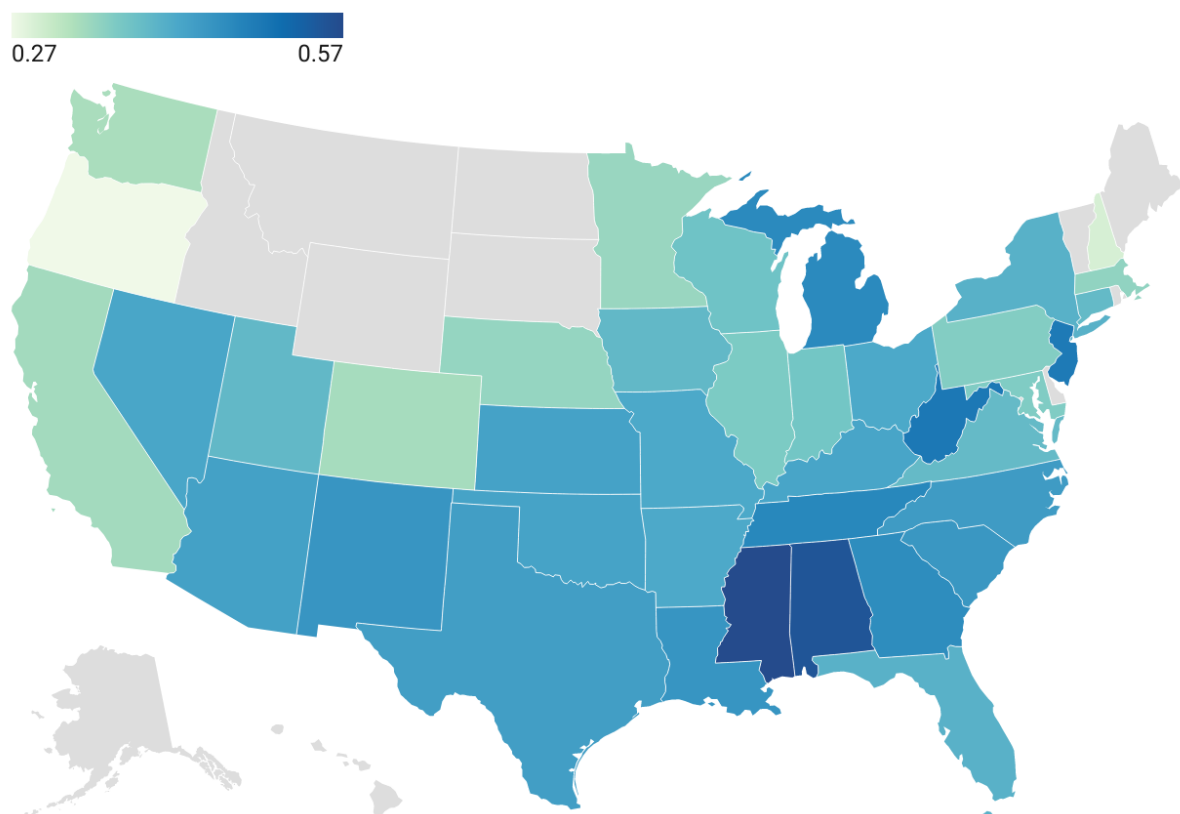
Figure 9.

We also observed regional variations. 44% of those in the South knew at least one person who died, compared to 37% of those in the Western U.S. and 38% of those in the Northeast and Midwest. Similarly, 18% in the South identified a family member who died, compared to 14% in the Midwest, 13% in the Northeast, and 15% in the Western U.S.

There was substantial state-to-state variability in the proportion of individuals who knew someone who died of COVID-19, with a low of 27% in Oregon to 57% in Mississippi and 55% in Alabama. In general, this paralleled official reports of [death rates per capita](#) by state.

We saw a similar pattern in the proportion of adults with a family member who died of COVID-19, from 9% in Wisconsin and 10% in Oregon, New Hampshire, and Kansas, up to 23% in Alabama and 24% in Mississippi.

State map of proportion who knew at least one person who died of COVID-19

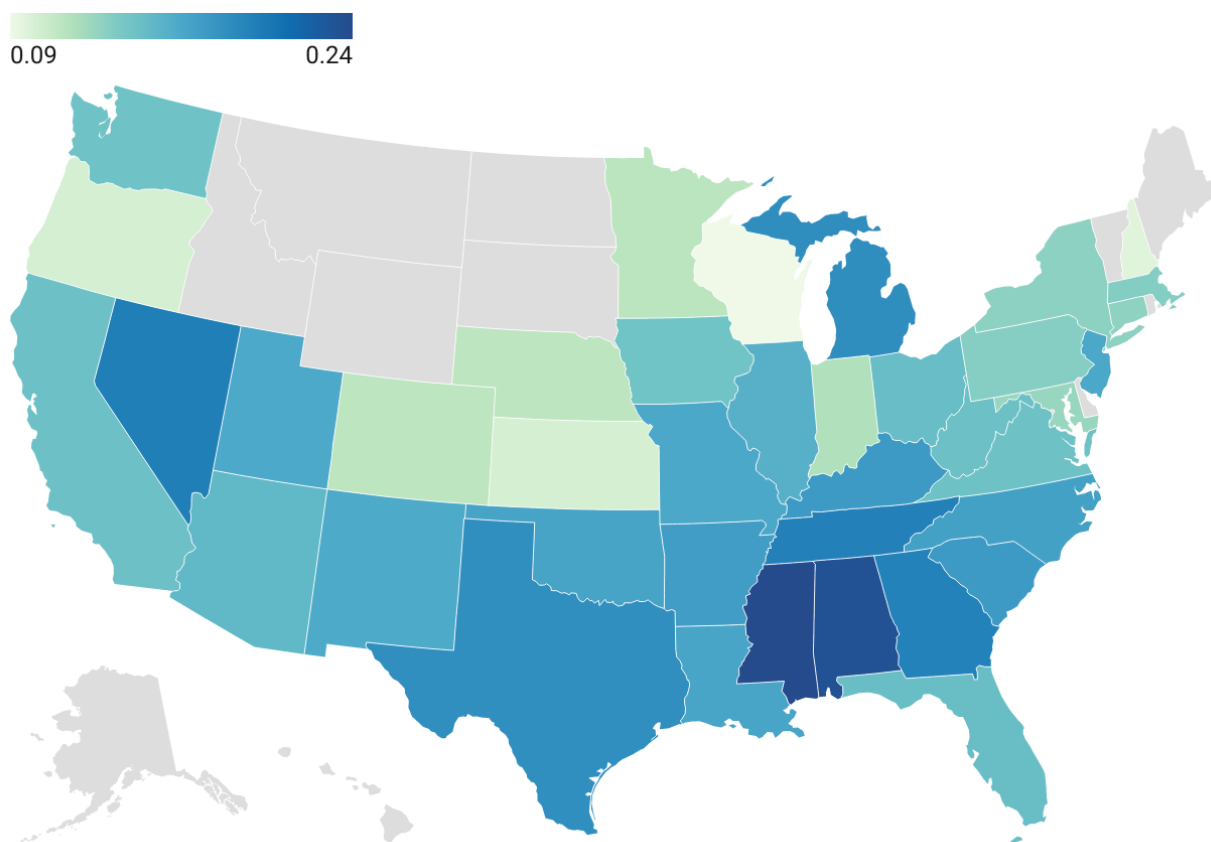


Missing states were not sufficiently sampled. N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 10.

State map of proportion with a family member who died of COVID-19



Missing states were not sufficiently sampled. N = 18103, Time Period: March 2022

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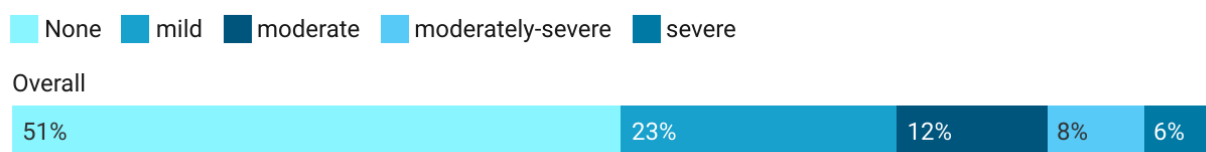
Figure 11.

2. Symptoms of major depression among U.S. adults

We next looked at the proportions of adults who reported symptoms of depression.

Overall, 51% of adults reported no depressive symptoms, 23% mild symptoms, and 26% moderate or greater symptoms – the threshold at which a primary care doctor would typically suggest further evaluation and treatment. In general, these numbers have decreased since their peak in December 2020, but otherwise, they are remarkably stable over time and still markedly elevated compared to estimates among adults prior to COVID-19, which indicated about [8% of adults](#) had moderate or greater depressive symptoms.

Proportion of adults reporting current depression at a given severity



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Figure 12.

National prevalence of moderate to severe depressive symptoms over time (by age group)

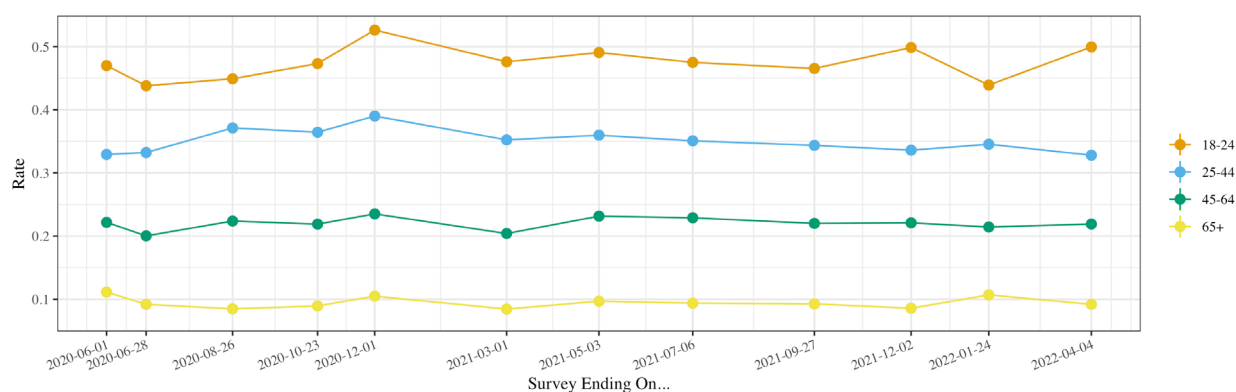
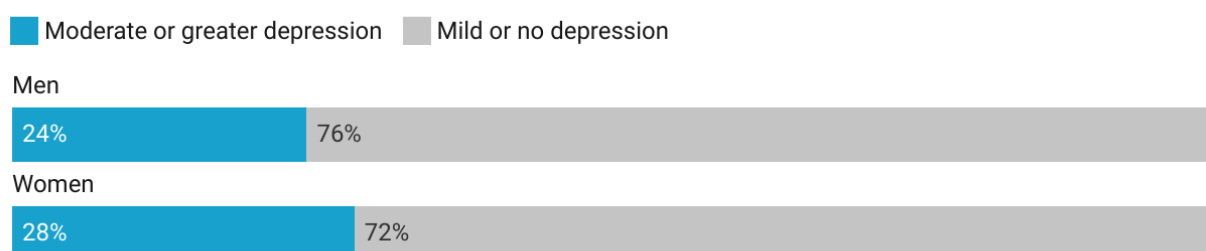


Figure 13.

Proportion of moderate or greater depression, by gender



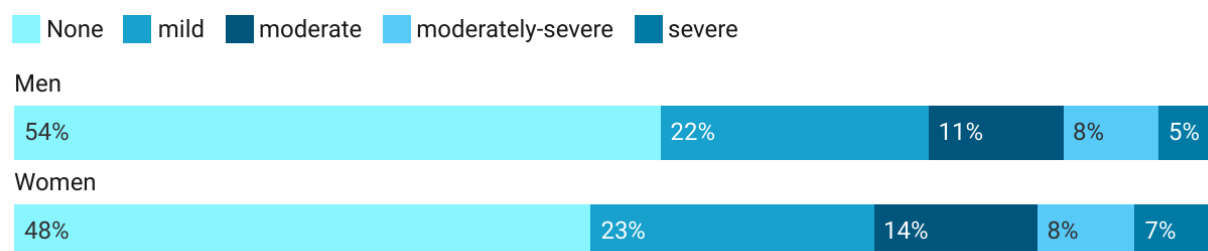
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Figure 14.

As in our prior surveys, moderate or greater depression was more common among women at 28%, compared to 24% among men.

Proportion of adults reporting current depression at a given severity (by gender)



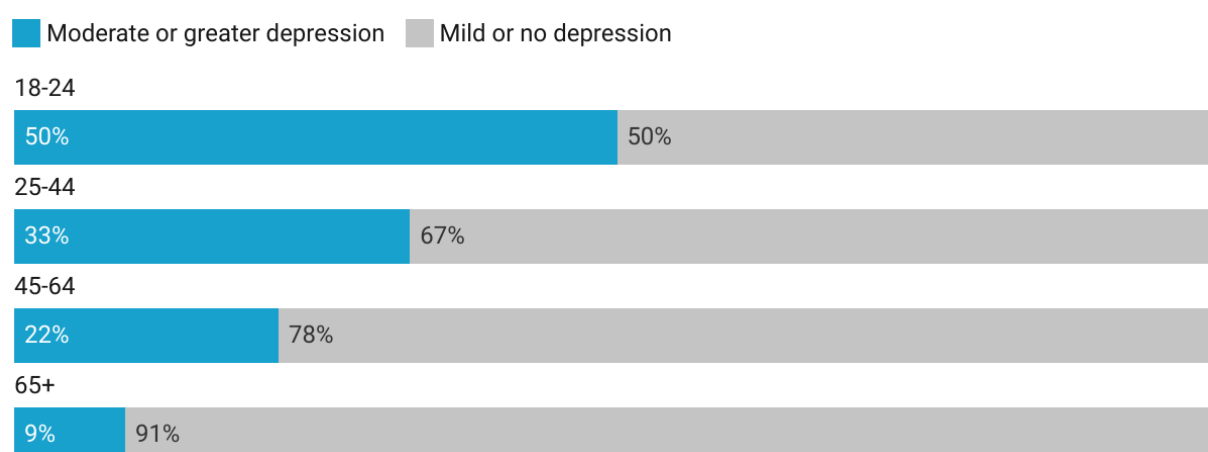
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Figure 15.

Rates of depression also continued to be substantially greater among younger compared to older adults: 50% among those 18-24, 33% for those 25-44, 22% for those 45-64, and 9% among those 65 and older. It is important to note that prior to the pandemic, levels of depression [tended to be similar](#) across age groups.

Proportion of moderate or greater depression (by age group)

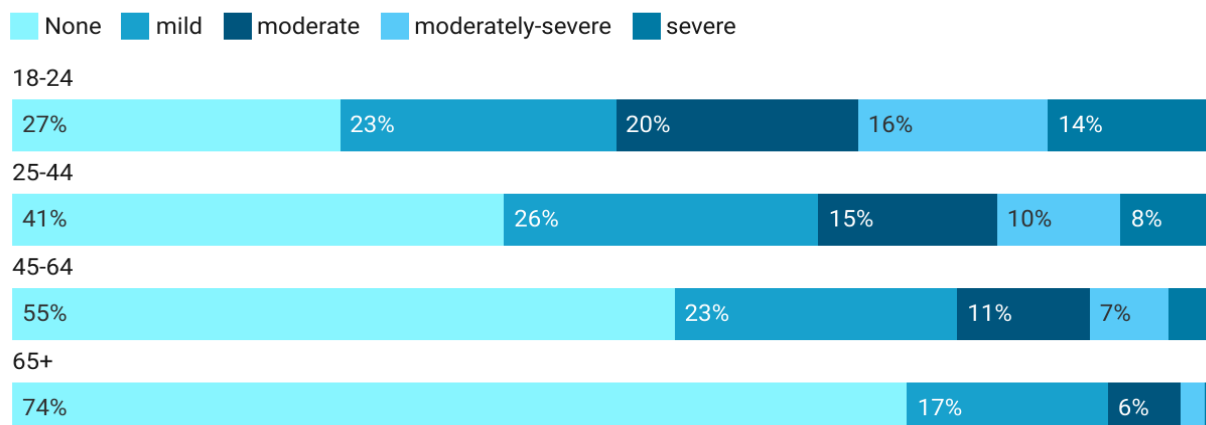


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Figure 16.

Proportion of adults reporting current depression at a given severity (by age)



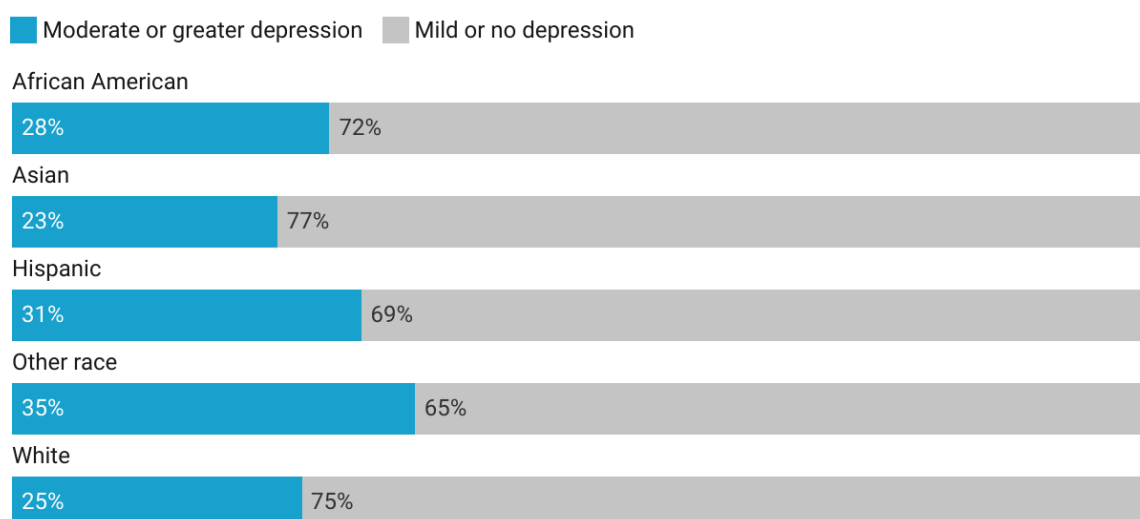
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Figure 17.

Rates of depression also exhibited some variation by race, with 28% of Black individuals and 31% of Hispanic individuals reporting moderate or greater depression, compared to 23% for those identifying as Asian and 25% among White individuals.

Proportion of moderate or greater depression (by race)

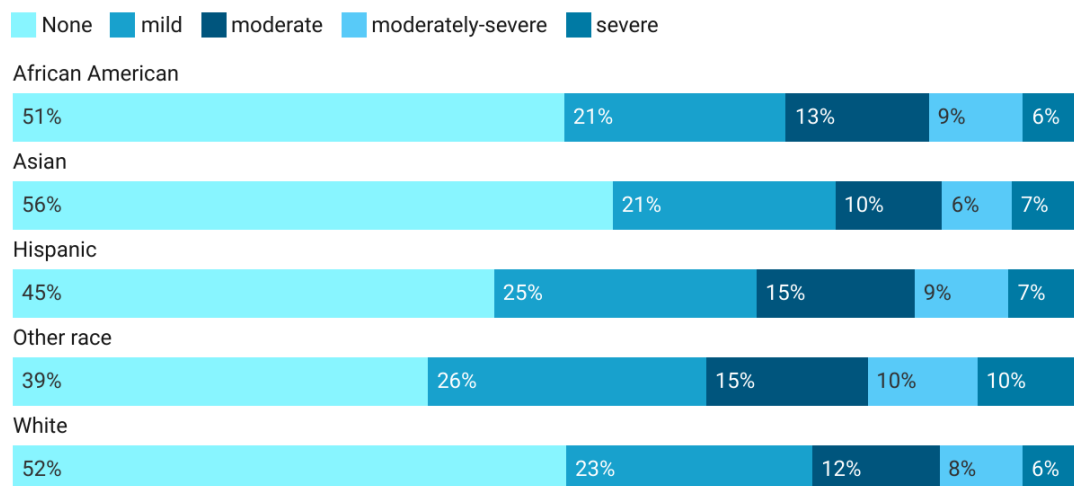


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Figure 18.

Proportion of adults reporting current depression at a given severity (by race)

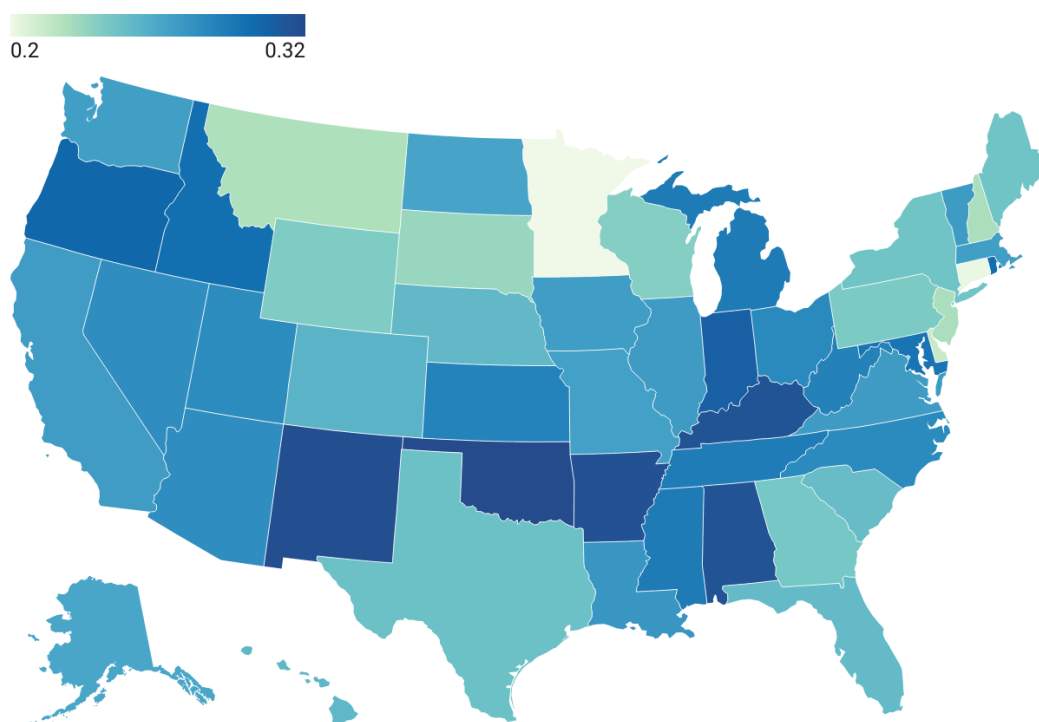


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Figure 19.

State map of proportion of moderate or greater depression



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Figure 20.

As with rates of exposure to COVID-19 deaths, rates of depression varied markedly by state. Depression levels were lowest in Minnesota and Connecticut at 20%; they were greatest in Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and New Mexico at 32%.

Depression also continues to show wide differences by political affiliation. Those who identify as Democrats have consistently reported higher levels of depression than Republicans, by as many as 7 percentage points. This gap is greatest among adults 18-24, where rates of depression are 14% greater among Democrats; in older age groups, this gap ranges from 2-4%. However, while levels of depression were usually similar between Democrats and Independents through March 2021, a gap has opened between these two groups since that time. The rate among Independents is now about 4 points higher.

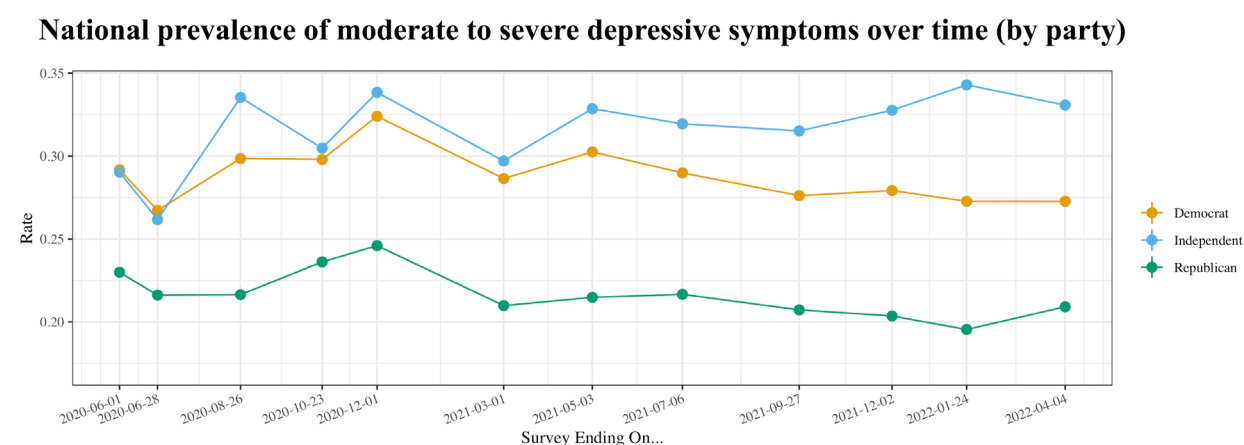


Figure 21.

There is one exception to the general trend of stability over time: differences between households with and without children at home. Since May 2021, when adults in households with children reported rates of depression about 10% greater than those in households without children, this difference has progressively diminished, and is now less than 5%.

Another encouraging trend is the gradual, modest, but consistent decrease in the proportion of adults who report having suicidal thoughts at least occasionally. Note that the y-axis on this figure reflects a narrow range, emphasizing that the absolute change is small. These rates are still historically high, at 19%, but less than on any prior survey since June 2020. (The 'notch' in the trend we observed in March 2021 may have reflected greater hopefulness in early spring a year ago, with the emergence of vaccination and the decline in the winter surge.)

National prevalence of moderate to severe depressive symptoms over time (by parent status)

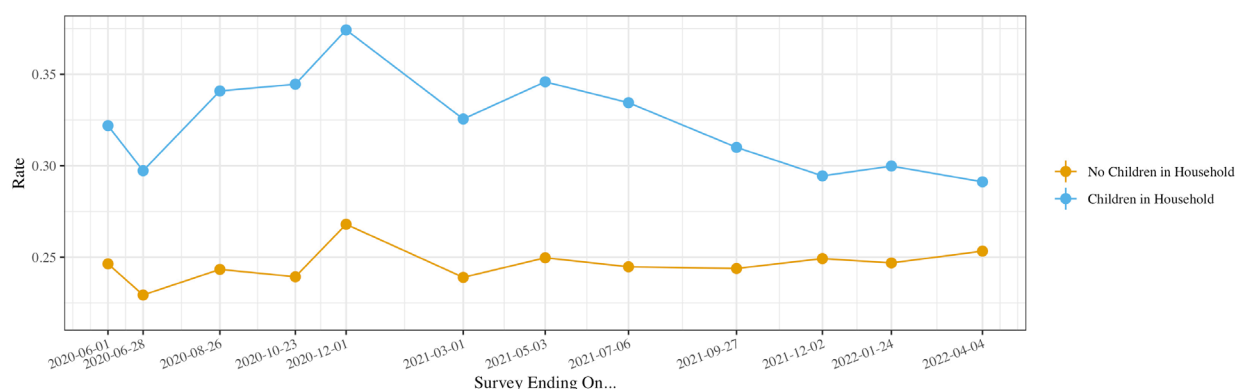


Figure 22.

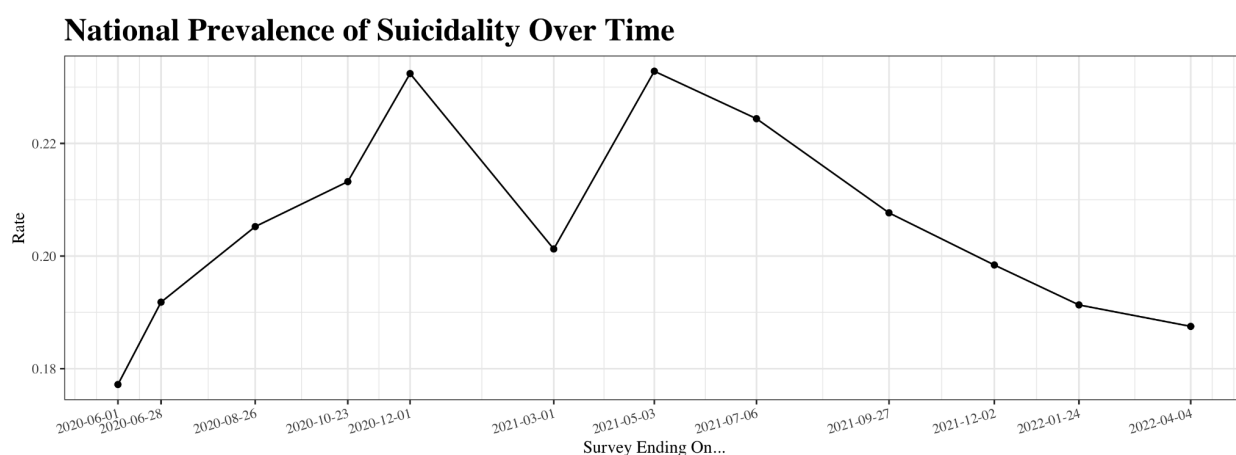
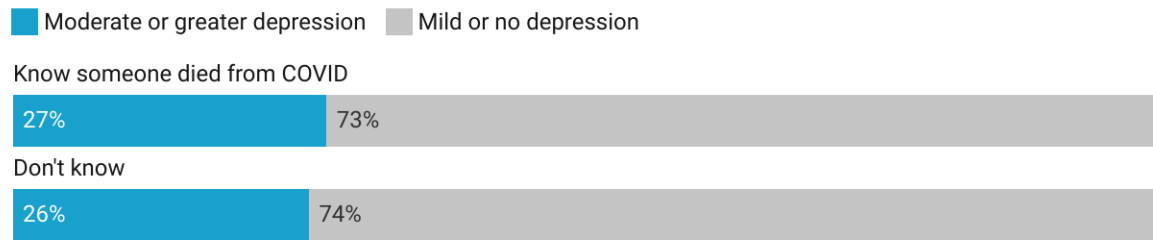


Figure 23.

3. Depression and COVID-19 deaths among family, friends, and acquaintances

Finally, we looked at the relationship between knowing someone who died of COVID-19 and rates of depression. Overall, there was little difference – 27% of those who knew someone who had died reported moderate or greater depression, compared to 26% among those who did not. But, among those with a family member who died, rates of depression were 31%, compared to 26% for those who did not have a family member who died; these effects were not explained by differences in age, gender, race and ethnicity, income, or U.S. region.

Relationship between knowing someone who died of COVID-19 and depression

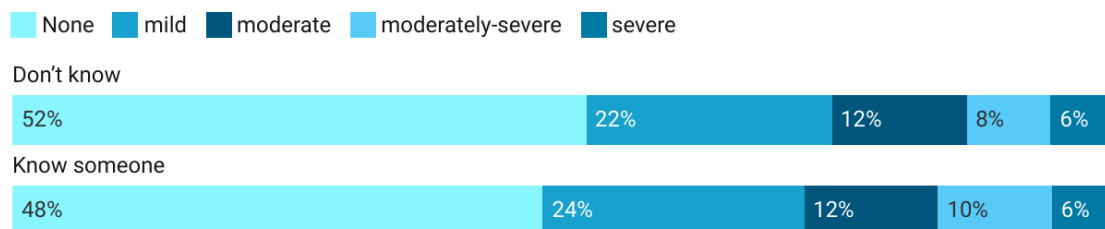


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Figure 24.

Relationship between knowing someone who died of COVID-19 and depression severity

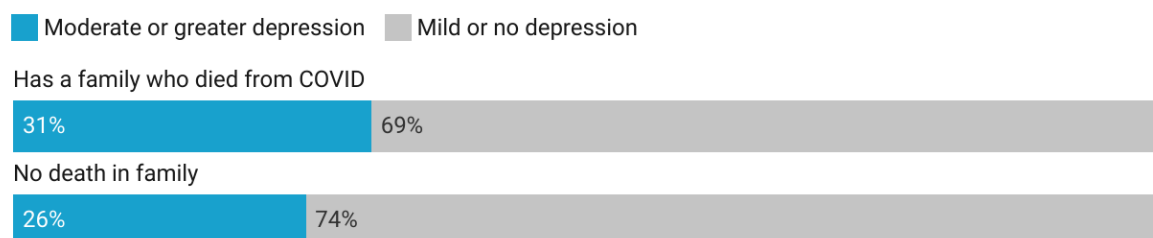


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Figure 25.

Relationship between have a family member who died of COVID-19 and depression

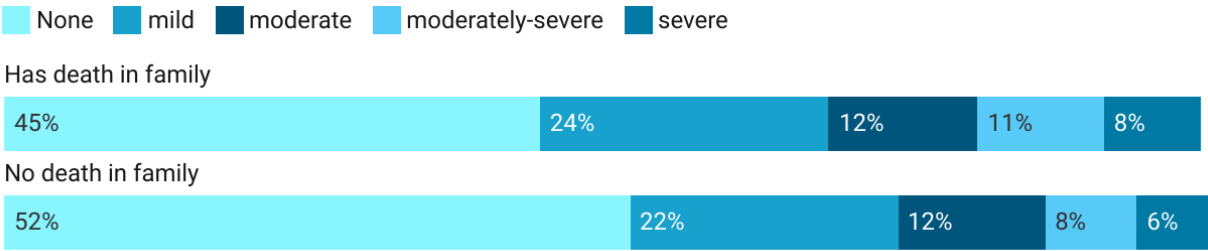


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Figure 26.

Proportion of adults reporting current depression at a given severity (by death in family due to COVID)



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Figure 27.

An important note: In our survey, we do not ask about how long ago someone’s friend or family member died, so we cannot distinguish between normal bereavement after a loss and depression that may persist and require treatment.

People seeking help for depression, anxiety, thoughts of suicide, or trouble with drugs or alcohol can call the SAMHSA Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or online at findtreatment.samhsa.gov. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255 or suicidepreventionlifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now.