
BLUE SHIELD OF CALIFORNIA FOUNDATION

Key Insights from a Survey of Californians about COVID-19, Domestic Violence, and Racism

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Blue Shield of California Foundation sponsored a statewide survey of 1,918 California adults 18 and older to understand experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence, and racism. The non-partisan research firm PerryUndem developed and analyzed the survey and Ipsos fielded the survey online January 6 – 22, 2021.¹

The survey finds that many Californians are experiencing serious impacts from the pandemic, particularly Latinx individuals, and that for some, there is increased tension in romantic relationships as a result. What is causing this tension – anxiety about the future, isolation from others, and more time together in the home. These inequities point to two distinct lived experiences across the state. Despite feeling some of the deepest impacts of the pandemic, Latinx and Black Californians are least likely to say they have felt isolated during the past year.

A key survey finding is that childhood experiences with abuse and witnessing domestic violence lead to a greater likelihood of experiencing domestic violence as an adult. Addressing the trauma of childhood experiences seems key in preventing domestic violence.

Compounding these experiences for people of color – particularly Black Californians – is the relentlessness of racism. Nearly half of Black adults in the survey do not feel accepted or valued as members of society. And most Californians agree racism has increased or stayed the same in the last few years – not decreased.

Finally, the survey identifies some directions for change on domestic violence. Domestic violence survivors identify the kind of supports that make them feel safe. We also tested different kinds of assistance that could help those who have experienced domestic violence

¹ The survey of 1,918 California adults included: 428 Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) adults; 423 Black adults; 401 Latinx adults; and 293 LGBTQ adults. The survey was offered in English, Chinese (simplified and traditional), Tagalog, and Spanish. The margin of sampling error for total results is ± 3.2 percentage points.

and all ideas receive large majority support. The survey also finds robust bipartisan support in California for alternatives to jail for those who have committed violence against a domestic partner. Following are key insights.

COVID-19 IMPACTS

Nearly 9 in 10 Californians (89%) say COVID-19 and the economic crisis have impacted them. The biggest impacts: parents having to help children with virtual learning and people seeing their incomes go down.

Californians of color are experiencing the most impacts from the pandemic. Among Latinx adults, for example, 36% say their income went down, 31% say they or a family member got the COVID-19 virus, 31% had to use savings to pay bills, and 27% had to go to their job even though they felt unsafe.

7 in 10 Californians (71%) have felt isolated from others since the pandemic started and 58% say they have felt trapped in their homes. Interestingly, Latinx (67%) and Black (66%) adults are least likely to say they have felt isolated. Also, half of adults (49%) say they have felt unsafe during the pandemic, with LGBTQ (64%) and AAPI adults (55%) most likely to say they felt unsafe.

3 in 10 Californians (29%) say there has been more tension in their romantic relationships since the beginning of the pandemic. And one-third of those say these tensions are becoming “unhealthy.” Most of those who say they have felt more tension identified anxiety about the future (63%) and isolation from family and friends (62%) as the main reasons for the tension.

RACISM

9 in 10 Californians think racism has increased in the last few years (62%) or stayed the same (28%). Only 10% think racism has decreased. Black Californians are most likely to say racism has increased (75%).

1 in 5 Californians (21%) say they do not feel accepted as equal and valuable members of society. But for Black Californians, it is almost half (47%) who say they do not feel accepted as equal members of society.

6 in 10 Californians (59%) believe that systems in our society (housing, health care, business, government) are set up to give white people more opportunities than people of color. Californians of color (Black 75%; Latinx 65%; AAPI 60%) are more likely to feel this way than white Californians (52%).

Two-thirds of Californians (67%) think if they were assaulted and called the police, they would help the situation. But some Californians hold conflicting views toward the police. For example, almost half of Black Californians say they would not go to the police if assaulted (17%) or feel the police would only make the situation worse (31%).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

9 in 10 Californians (91%) feel domestic violence is a serious problem. Two-thirds consider domestic violence to be a public issue that should be addressed by all of us versus a private issue that should stay within families (67% public issue vs. 15% private issue).

Most Californians have a broad and inclusive understanding of domestic violence.

They include physical (90%), sexual (89%), and emotional (86%) abuse as part of the definition. They also consider mental control (83%), threats of sharing private information on social media (78%), financial control (72%), and attempts to control the reproductive health of a partner (67%) to be domestic violence.

More than one-quarter of Californians (27%) report they have either experienced abuse or witnessed domestic violence as a child. This childhood experience matters, and it appears the trauma is passed on. Those who experienced abuse or witnessed domestic violence as a child are much more likely to have firsthand or personal experience with domestic violence as an adult (71% have been touched by the issue).

More than half of Californians (56%) who have experienced domestic violence say they felt “shame” about their situation. Four in ten (40%) say they have felt afraid to tell others about their experience. Only 1 in 4 felt supported by family (25%) or friends (23%).

DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE

9 in 10 California survivors of domestic abuse say having a safe place to live is “very” important in helping them feel safe (91%). Other key factors to safety for survivors are financial stability (88%), personal freedom (83%) and having a steady job (80%).

8 in 10 Californians (79%) support alternatives to jail for people who cause domestic violence. This could be counseling, including substance abuse counseling, supervision by a social worker, or restitution to the person who experienced the violence (for example, paying for their therapy, medical expenses, or loss of employment). This idea has support across political party ideology in California (Democrat 88%; Independent 75%; Republican 66%).

9 in 10 Californians support childcare (93%), food (93%), housing (93%), and transportation (91%) assistance to help those who have experienced domestic violence. Another 8 in 10 support paid leave from work (83%) and cash assistance (83%).