

# **THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS**

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and

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# FINDINGS from

- CONVERGE Facing Covid-19 at Home SURVEY, Fall 2021  
(University North Carolina, Rowan, Bucknell, FAMU, University of Pittsburgh)  
n=595
- ROWAN Fall COVID Survey, Fall 2021  
n=296 FGCS; 755 CGCS

**FGCS**=First-generation college students

(Students whose parents did not complete college)

**CGCS**=Continuing-generation college students

(Students with at least one parent who completed a college degree)

1. The impacts of COVID-19 on FGCS
2. How the impacts of COVID-19 vary by race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender
3. How the impacts of COVID-19 vary between FGCS and CGCS
4. How the impacts of COVID-19 on FGCS vary across colleges

# **1. THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON FGCS**

Emotional Discomforts	% Change (+/-)
Was irritable or grouchy	+94%
Was afraid of things	+88%
Cried a lot	+86%
Had trouble relaxing	+78%
Was nervous	+72%
Was moody	+68%
Felt depressed	+52%
Binged	+51%
Had trouble sleeping	+43%
Vomited on purpose	+2%
Felt loved	-5%
Felt like I did right	-39%
Woke up refreshed	-64%

# Mental Health

*More* likely to be irritable, grouchy  
*More* likely to be afraid and cry  
*More* likely to be nervous.  
*More* likely to have trouble relaxing, sleeping  
*More* likely to be moody, feel depressed, binge  
*Less* likely to feel I did right  
*Less* likely to wake up refreshed

# Physical Health

Physical Discomforts	% Change (+/-)
Had poor appetite	+102%
Tired easily or felt like I didn't have energy	+81%
Had diarrhea	+64%
Had constipation	+53%
Woke up feeling tired	+45%
Had watery or itchy eyes	+50%
Had soreness in muscles or joints	+46%
Had a stomach ache	+46%
Had skin problems	+44%
Vomited or felt like vomiting	+40%
Had a headache	+18%
Had bothersome pain	+26%
Was dizzy	+22%
Lost weight without trying	+18%
Had trouble urinating	0%
Had chest pain	-4%
Was wheezing or had trouble breathing	-10%
Felt really sick overall	-18%
Had a cough	-27%
Was pain free	-31%
Felt really healthy	-41%
Had a fever or chills	-52%

*More* likely to have poor appetite  
*More* likely to tire easily, lack energy  
*More* likely to wake feeling tired  
*More* stomach disorders, muscle soreness, skin problems, itchy eyes

*Less likely* to feel really healthy  
*Less* likely to be pain free  
*Less* likely to report symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, chills, cough, wheezing)

# IMPACTS OF COVID-19

## Perceived Barriers to Academic Persistence

PERSONAL BARRIERS (Mental and Physical Health)	BEFORE COVID-19 (% Agree/SA)	TODAY (% Agree/SA)
<b>**I feel overwhelmed.</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>88%</b>
I struggle with low self-esteem.	50%	55%
<b>**I struggle with adjusting to college.</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>**I am experiencing loneliness.</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>70%</b>
I have a mental health condition not related to COVID-19.	35%	40%
I am homesick.	21%	24%
I have personal health problems not related to COVID-19 (e.g., cancer, diabetes, etc.).	16%	18%

<b>SOCIAL AND FAMILY BARRIERS</b>	<b>BEFORE COVID-19 (% Agree/SA)</b>	<b>TODAY (% Agree/SA)</b>
<b>**I miss my friends from college.</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>70%</b>
I am responsible for the emotional needs of my family.	42%	49%
An immediate family member has a physical health problem not related to COVID-19 (e.g., cancer, diabetes, etc.).	45%	47%
An immediate family member has a mental health condition not related to COVID-19.	39%	41%
I am physically close to my family. (% disagree)	38%	39%
<b>**My family obligations make it difficult to attend college.</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>39%</b>
I am responsible for the physical needs of my family.	23%	29%
I am emotionally close with my family. (% disagree)	24%	27%
I have primary responsibility for the care of children (0-18) at home	--	32%



	<b>BEFORE COVID-19 (% Agree/SA)</b>	<b>TODAY (% Agree/SA)</b>
<b>FINANCIAL BARRIERS</b>		
<b>*I will have enough funds to return to college next year.</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>*I am concerned about having enough funds to complete college.</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>65%</b>
I am unable to borrow money for college.	29%	32%
<b>ACADEMIC BARRIERS</b>		
<b>**I have a great study environment. (% disagree)</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>**My grades are lower than expected.</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>**I feel prepared for college. (% disagree)</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>**I have poor study habits.</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>55%</b>
I am not concerned about my academic eligibility (e.g., academic probation). (% disagree)	42%	45%
<b>*I like school. (% disagree)</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS</b>		
<b>**I have access to resources that will help me excel in school. (% disagree)</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>33%</b>
At my university, I face inequalities because of my social class.	28%	31%
At my university, I face inequalities because of my race.	13%	14%

# IMPACTS OF COVID-19

## PERCEPTION OF PROBLEMS CAUSED BY COVID-19

<b>% PERCEIVING NEGATIVE IMPACT ON:</b>	<b>IMMEDIATE PROBLEM</b>	<b>LONG-TERM PROBLEM</b>
<b>Mental health</b>	68%	55%
<b>Connections with friends</b>	55%	35%
<b>Physical health</b>	45%	32%
<b>Connections with family</b>	32%	24%
<b>Access to supplies</b>	32%	15%
<b>Personal loss</b>	23%	20%
<b>Access to (enough) food</b>	23%	14%

+ 30% lost their job + 18% stopped working for other reasons  
58% had someone in their household lose job, take pay cut, or be furloughed

## **2. HOW THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 VARIES BY**

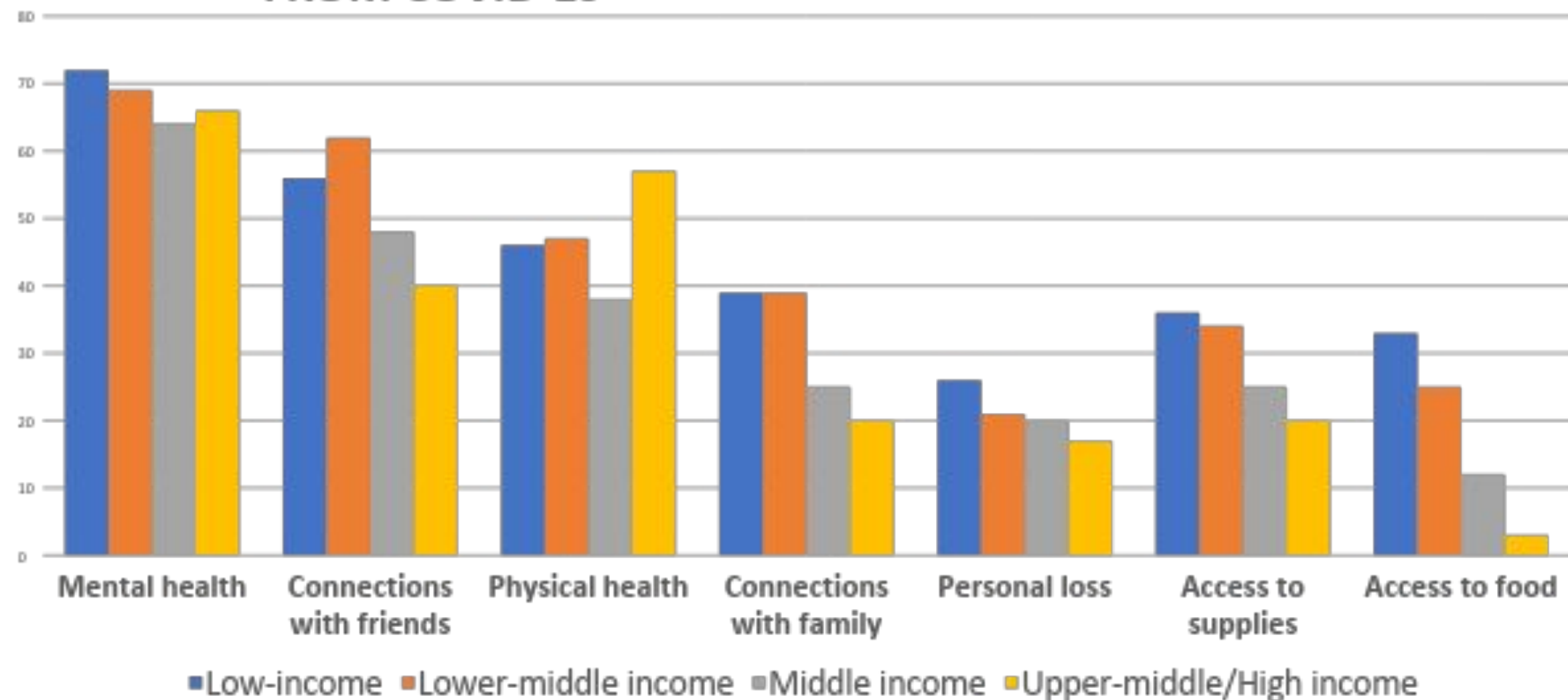
- RACE/ETHNICITY**
- SOCIAL CLASS**
- GENDER**

RACE/ETHNIC VARIATION						
% PERCEIVING NEGATIVE IMPACT ON:	IMMEDIATE PROBLEM			LONG-TERM PROBLEM		
	White	Asian	URM	White	Asian	URM
Mental health	<b>73</b>	68	64	55	53	55
Connections with friends	55	57	52	34	34	34
Physical health	47	42	43	34	36	28
Connections with family	<b>40</b>	26	28	24	18	24
Access to supplies	<b>43</b>	23	34	9	12	<b>20</b>
Personal loss	18	23	24	14	21	<b>24</b>
Access to (enough) food	18	21	24	9	10	<b>19</b>

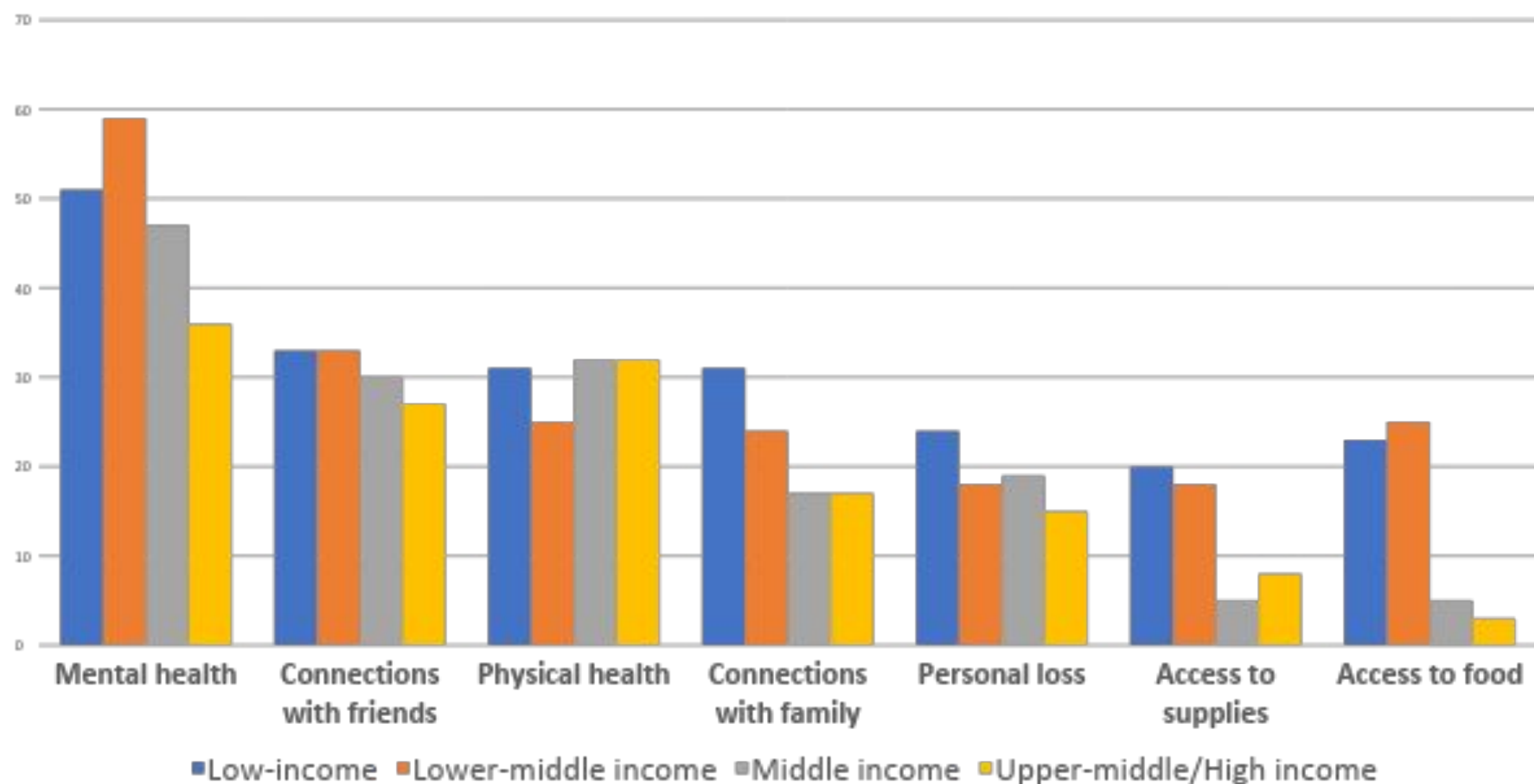
# RACE/ETHNICITY VARIATION

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS	PRIOR TO COVID-19			TODAY		
(% agreeing/strongly agreeing)	White	Asian	URM	White	Asian	URM
<b>**I face inequality because of my race</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>
I face inequality because of my social class	26	26	31	0	5	5
I have access to resources that will help me excel in school	5	16	10	35	29	32

## SOCIAL CLASS AND PERCEIVED IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS FROM COVID-19



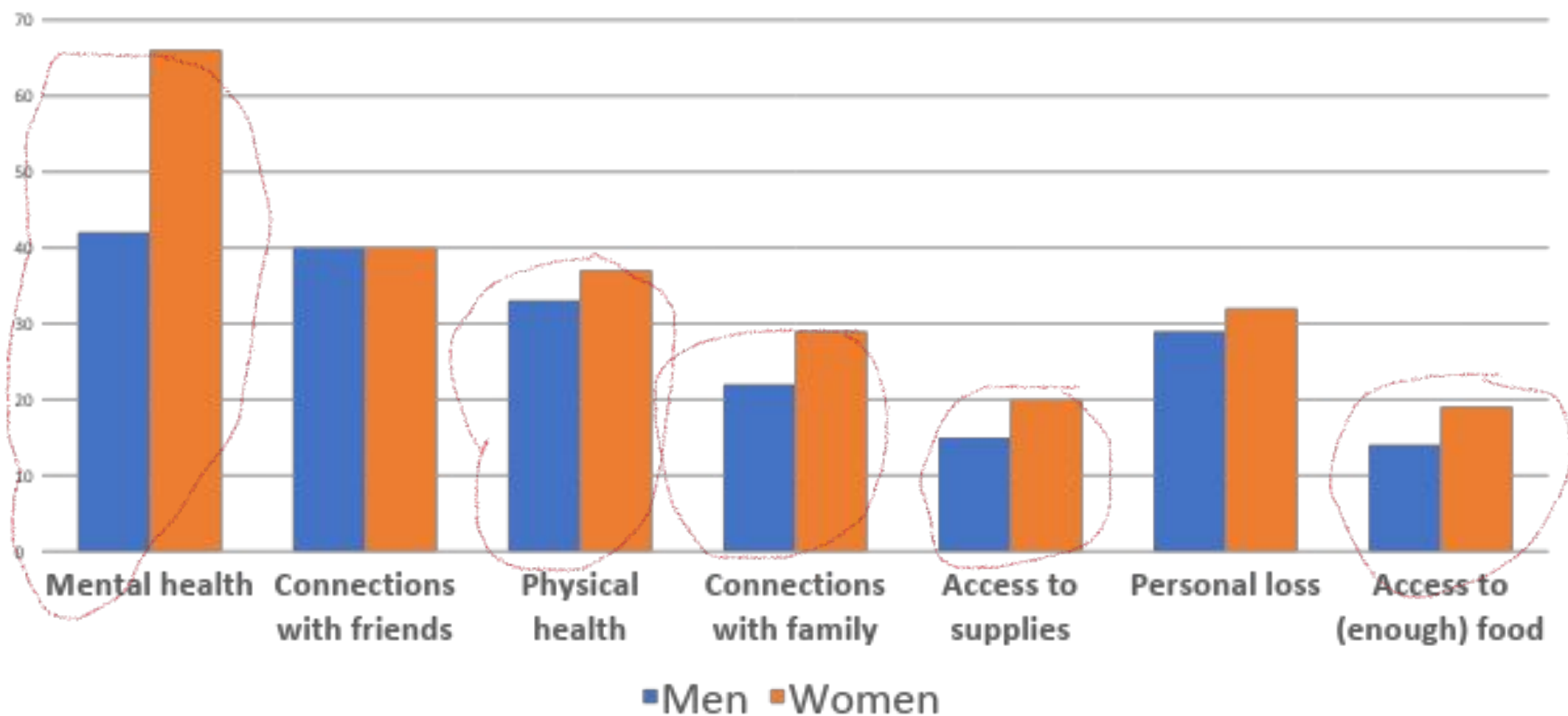
## SOCIAL CLASS AND PERCEIVED LONG-TERM PROBLEMS FROM COVID-19



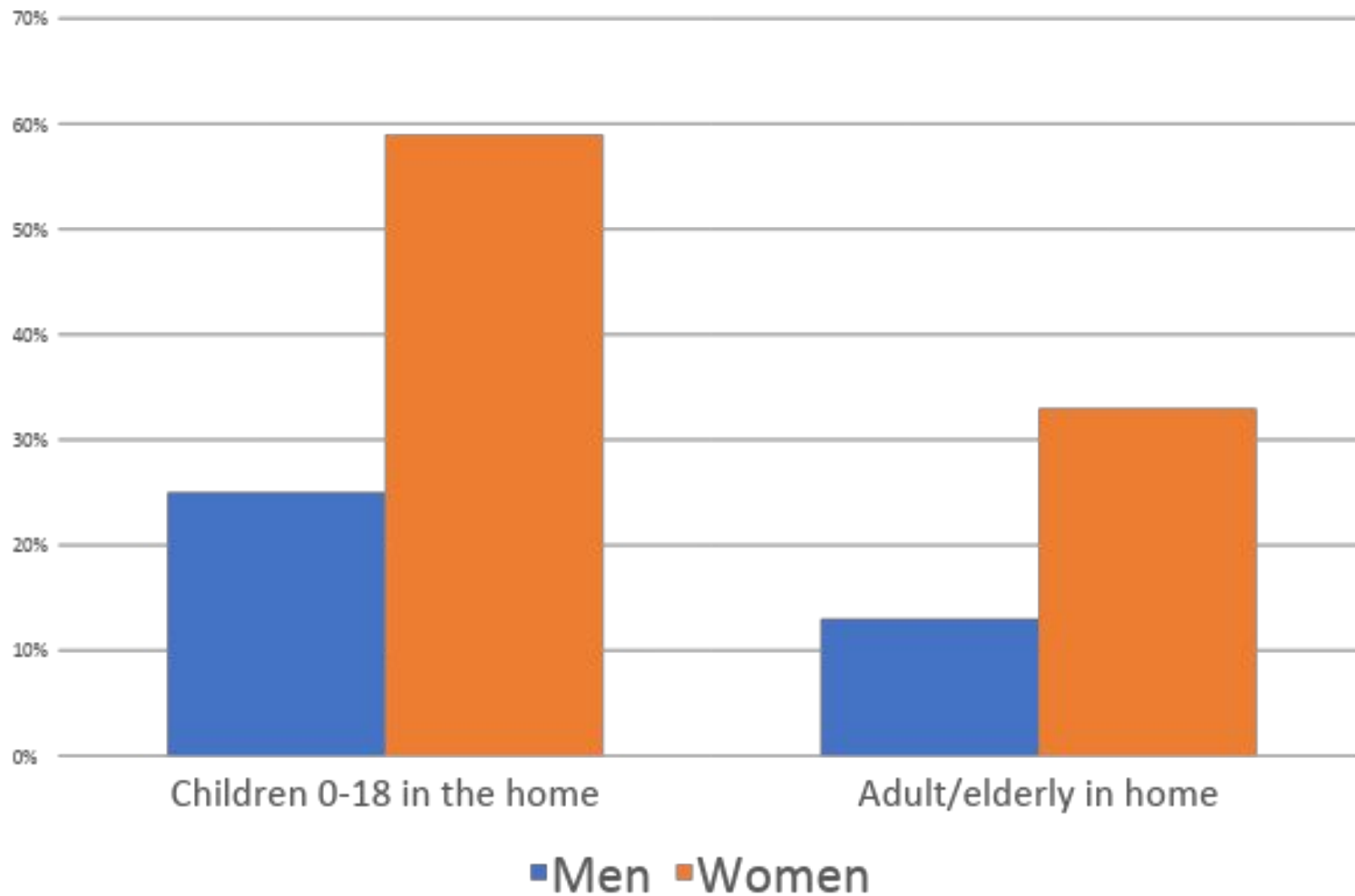
INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS	Immediate Problem				Long-term Problem			
	Low-income	Lower-middle income	Middle income	Upper-middle/High income	Low-income	Lower-middle income	Middle income	Upper-middle/High income
I face inequality because of my RACE	18	13	8	3	18	16	10	0
I face inequality because of my SOCIAL CLASS	42	31	14	6	32	26	10	0
I have ACCESS TO RESOURCES that will help me excel in school (% disagree)	24	5	8	6	44	30	25	24



## GENDER AND PERCEIVED LONG-TERM PROBLEMS FROM COVID-19



## % PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAREGIVING IN HOME



### **3. HOW THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 VARY BETWEEN FGCS AND CGCS**

# Differences between FGCS and CGCS in:

## ***Minimal*** Differences in:

- Mental and physical health
- Perception of social barriers to college persistence
- Academic-related barriers to college persistence
- Commitment to continued college persistence
- Access to resources needed for virtual learning environment
- Access to emotional support, love and affection, advice to solve problems

## ***Significant*** Differences in:

- Family-related barriers to college persistence
- Financial vulnerability

Controlling for ***Social Class*** narrows some of the differences between FGCS and CGCS, but exacerbates other differences

<b>FAMILY BARRIERS TO COLLEGE PERSISTENCE</b>	<b>FGCS</b>	<b>CGCS</b>
<b>I am responsible for the emotional needs of my family.</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>My family obligations make it difficult to attend college.</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>I am responsible for the physical needs of my family.</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>I have primary responsibility for a child 0-12 in my home.</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>I have primary responsibility for a child 13-18 in my home.</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>I have primary responsibility for an infirm adult or elderly person in my home.</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ACADEMIC BARRIERS TO COLLEGE PERSISTENCE</b>	<b>FGCS</b>	<b>CGCS</b>
<b>I have a great study environment. (% disagree)</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>My grades are lower than expected.</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>I feel prepared for college during this pandemic. (% disagree)</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>I have poor study habits.</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>I like school. (% disagree)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>I am very concerned about my ability to balance my academic obligations with my family and other personal obligations since the coronavirus outbreak.</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>42</b>

# ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY OF FGCS AND CGCS, Before COVID-19 and Today

	Before COVID-19		Today	
	FGCS	CGCS	FGCS	CGCS
I am seriously concerned about my ability to finance my college education	14%	5%	19%	10%
I am confident in my ability to finance my college education	27%	43%	19%	34%
I am responsible for all of my college expenses on my own			46%	15%
I worry that I won't have enough money to care of myself and my family because of COVID-19 (% agree/strongly agree)	--	--	24%	11%
I have access to a way to get financial support if I need it (% all of the time)	--	--	20%	34%
(% a little or of the time)	--	--	38%	21%

## 4. HOW THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON FGCS VARY ACROSS COLLEGES

# Differences between FGCS at 3 Campuses

	FAMU	Rowan	UNC-Chapel Hill
<b>Undergraduates (General)</b>			
<b>Total # Undergraduates</b>	<b>7,818</b>	<b>16,000</b>	<b>18,526</b>
<b>Acceptance rate</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Average annual cost	\$23,433	\$25,529	\$25,798
<b>% White</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>% Black</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>FGCS (in Sample)</b>	n=64	n=213	n=264
<b>% White</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>% URM</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>% Low income</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>37%</b>
% Lower middle class	33%	31%	37%
% Women	79%	69%	75%



# IMPACTS OF COVID-19

## Perceived Barriers to Academic Persistence

<b>PERSONAL BARRIERS (Mental and Physical Health) (% Agree, Strongly Agree)</b>	<b>FAMU</b>	<b>ROWAN</b>	<b>UNC</b>
I feel overwhelmed.	81	85	92
I struggle with low self-esteem.	23	52	63
I struggle with adjusting to college.	46	59	67
I am experiencing loneliness.	51	62	82
I have a mental health condition not related to COVID-19.	31	35	44
I am homesick.	30	17	27
I have personal health problems not related to COVID-19 (e.g., cancer, diabetes, etc.).	12	17	18

<b>VARIATION ACROSS COLLEGES</b>	<b>FAMU</b>	<b>ROWAN</b>	<b>UNC</b>
<b>FINANCIAL BARRIERS</b> (% agree/strongly agree)			
I am concerned about having enough funds to complete college.	<b>76</b>	<b>72</b>	57
I am unable to borrow money for college.	<b>48</b>	27	32
<b>ACADEMIC BARRIERS</b>			
I have a great study environment. (% disagree)	38	51	<b>69</b>
My grades are lower than expected.	32	52	<b>63</b>
I feel prepared for college. (% disagree)	50	43	<b>58</b>
I have poor study habits.	42	55	<b>62</b>
I am not concerned about my academic eligibility (e.g., academic probation). (% disagree)	47	43	44
I like school. (% disagree)	40	35	46
<b>INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS</b>			
I have access to resources that will help me excel in school. (% disagree)	29	27	32
At my university, I face inequalities because of my social class.	19	21	<b>40</b>
At my university, I face inequalities because of my race.	7	10	<b>20</b>

# There is variation across colleges; why?

- Institutional environment?
  - Proportion FGCS?
  - Institutional resources?
  - Composition of FGCS? CGCS?
  - COVID-19 policies?
- Demographics?
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Age
  - Family status
- Differential COVID-19 impacts?

# CONCLUSIONS

## 1. The impacts of COVID-19 on FGCS

- Considerable impacts on mental and physical “discomforts”
- Increased barriers to academic persistence, especially related to mental health
- Increased pressures to balance family obligations with college (but family obligations similar to pre-COVID-19)
- Increased financial insecurity
- Increased academic insecurity
- Decrease in access to resources needed to succeed in college

# CONCLUSIONS (cont'd)

## 2. How the impacts of COVID-19 vary by race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender

- ❖ Some immediate negative effects greater for **whites**; Long-term effects of loss and material insecurity greater for **URM's**
- ❖ **Lower income** more impacted long-term by effects on family, personal loss, and access to supplies & food, and perceived institutional barriers to college success supplies and food, and problematic family connections
- ❖ Women have greater home responsibilities, may be related to longer term impacts on mental health, access

# CONCLUSIONS (cont'd)

## 3. How the impacts of COVID-19 vary between FGCS and CGCS

Much similarity. But **Greater** impact of COVID-19 for FGCS in:

- Family-related barriers to college persistence
- Financial vulnerability

## 4. How the impacts of COVID-19 on FGCS vary across colleges

❖ Variation across colleges, but explanations need further research

?s/Comments?

Thank you!