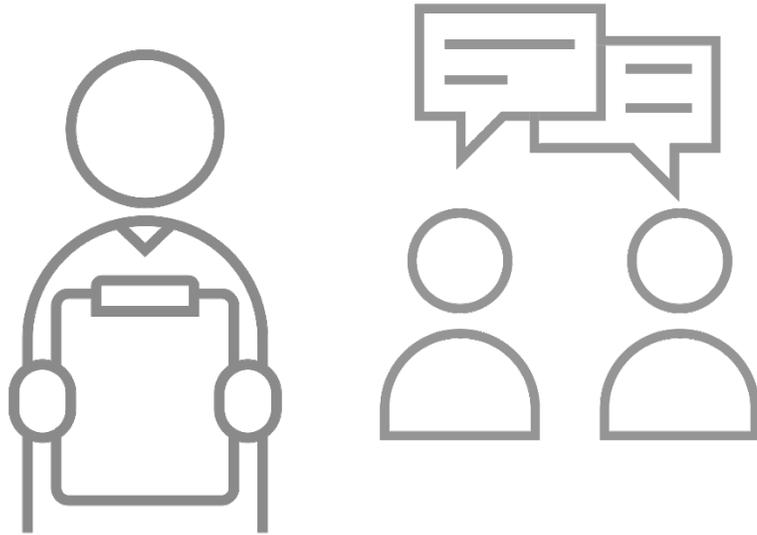


SUMMARY REPORT FOR THE BOONE COUNTY WORK, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUBSTANCE USE RESEARCH STUDY



Data Collected 2020 – 2021 by the UIC Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use (BCWMHSU) Study Research Team

[BCWMHSU Study Website](#) 



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AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

University of Illinois at Chicago

Tessa Bonney

Principal Investigator of the BCWMHSU Study
Assistant Professor in the UIC School of Public Health

Evelyn Diaz

Research Assistant for the BCWMHSU Study
Research Assistant for the Boone County Health Department (Fall 2021)

Marina Tecuanhuey

Research Assistant for the BCWMHSU Study

Molly Wendland

Research Assistant for the BCWMHSU Study
Research Assistant for the Boone County Health Department (Fall 2021)

Boone County Health Department

Emily Morales Reyes

Graduate Research Assistant for the BCWMHSU Study
Coordinator of the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative

Amanda Mehl

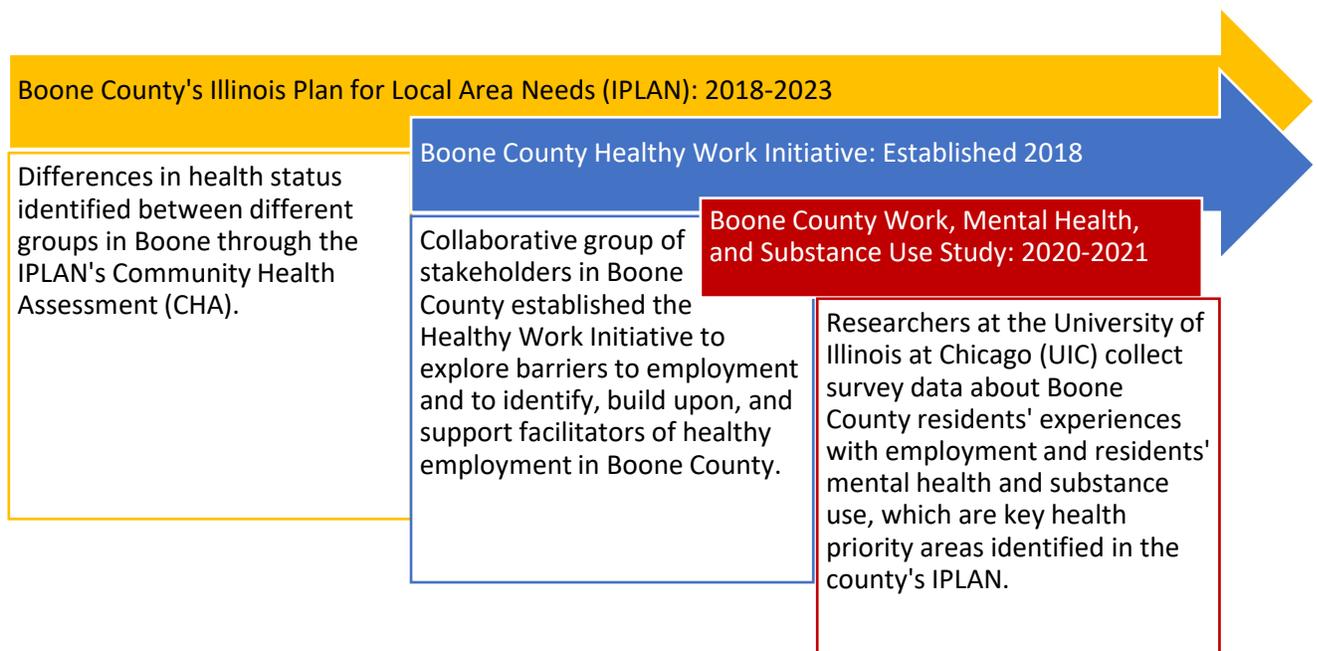
Public Health Administrator for the Boone County Health Department

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BACKGROUND

The Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use Study arose from the need for more comprehensive information about Boone County residents' work experiences and how those experiences may be related to priority health metrics, including mental health and substance use, in the county. The Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use Study is a research study that was conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health with support from the Boone County Health Department. This research study was directly informed by and was designed to compliment the ongoing work of the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative. A brief background to the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative and the Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use Study is included below. Detailed information about the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative and how it fits into the county's strategic priorities for health can be found in the Boone County Health Work Initiative [Phase I](#) and [Phase II](#) reports.



Through Boone County's most recent community health assessment, completed as part of the [2018-2023 Illinois Plan for Local Area Needs \(IPLAN\)](#), the Boone County Health Department identified disparities in health status (in other words, differences in how healthy individuals were) among various segments of the Boone County population. Available data at the county level showed compelling health disparities by gender, race and ethnicity, age, and household income. Many of these same characteristics are known to contribute to disparities in employment status, quality of employment, and stability of employment.

A question thus emerged from the Boone County IPLAN:

How might characteristics of employment contribute to the health disparities observed among county residents?

To answer this question and to begin to address health disparities related to employment, the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative was established in 2018. During the first phase of the initiative, partners developed goals and recommendations for the initiative's task force, including recommendations to develop a comprehensive county and city strategic plan linked to the 2018-2023 IPLAN and to conduct a workforce-specific needs assessment. The Boone County Healthy Work Initiative's strategic plan was completed at the end of 2018 and is available [here](#). To better understand the needs of the county's workforce, the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative team conducted a series of focus groups with county residents in 2019. The findings from these focus groups are available [here](#). Together, the strategic plan and the focus group findings contributed to the development of the Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use Study, which began in 2020 and concluded in 2021.

Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use Study

In the fall of 2019, representatives of the Boone County Healthy Work Initiative met with Dr. Tessa Bonney, a researcher at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, to discuss the development of a survey to hear from more residents of Boone County. This survey represented an opportunity to learn more about residents' work situations, facilitators of and barriers to employment, and, as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, work-related challenges during the pandemic. This survey was also an opportunity to learn more about how work might be related to residents' behavioral health outcomes, a key health concern that emerged in the 2018-2023 IPLAN.

METHODS

Sampling & Recruitment

The target population for the Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use survey was Boone County residents age 18+ who were English and/or Spanish speakers and who were employed at the time of survey or who had had been employed within 24 months of survey participation. Our sample consisted of (1) Random Digit Dial (RDD) sampling frame, primarily cell phone numbers with area codes inclusive of Boone County, and (2) convenience sampling using flyers, both electronic (posted online via social media) and paper (posted in strategic locations throughout Boone County).

Recruitment and screening were performed to each potential participant in order to find out if they were eligible to participate in the survey. These recruitments and screening were conducted via electronic form (linked to social media posts and QR codes on fliers) or verbally by a member of the research team. Potential participants who were eligible were provided an informed consent document and were asked if they consented to participation in the survey prior to beginning the survey.

Survey Participation Eligibility Requirements:

- Residence in Boone County at time of survey
- Adults 18 years of age or older
- Employed within 24 months prior to survey participation
- Speak English or Spanish

Recruitment & Data Collection:

- Telephone, e-fliers, and fliers posted around Boone County
- Telephone survey, administered by member of the UIC research team.
- Participants compensated \$25 gift card.

Data Collection

Survey responses were collected over the telephone. A member of the research team read each question and participants responded verbally by either selecting an answer from a number of options for certain questions or giving an open-ended response for others. The research team member inputted responses on the computer that were then able to be downloaded into SPSS and Excel for analysis. Participants were compensated with a \$25 gift card for their time.

Data Analysis

Research team members conducted analyses of data using SPSS version 26 and Microsoft Excel. Results for each survey item were analyzed descriptively for all participants, and then the research team was able to compare responses between participants to look for potential disparities between participants based on group characteristics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender, measures of job quality, etc.).

FINDINGS

Demographics

The following table compares the demographics of our survey respondents to the available data from the US Census Bureau for Boone County.

	US Census Data	Respondents' Data
Population	53,448	172
Gender		
Female	50%	81%
Male	50%	19%
Income		
Median	69,272	75,500
Race		
White	82%	82%
Black/African American	3%	3%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	6%
Asian	1%	2%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%
Other	13%	7%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	24%	19%
Household		
Average household size	2.86	3.3
Child in home	34%	54%
Marital Status		
Married	53%	48%
Divorced	10%	12%
Separated or widowed	7%	5%
Single	30%	35%
Education		
High school graduate or GED	35%	35%
Some college	20%	9%
Associate degree	8%	16%
Bachelor's degree or higher	23%	39%
Other	14%	1%

Individual characteristics: Our sample consisted of 19% males and 81% females. The median household income for respondents was \$75,500; however, this varied greatly from \$1,500 to \$400,000 per year. Most of our respondents (82%) identified as white; 19% of our participants identified as being Hispanic, Latino, or from a Spanish Origin. The vast majority (91%) of respondents said that they were born in the United States. Nearly 39% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, and another 16% have an associate degree. 9% of residents completed some college coursework. Among the rest, there were 1% that said other, and 35% that completed their high school degree or GED.

- 77% of residents believe that having a high school diploma helped them to find or keep work, and 88% believed that having a college degree helped them to find or keep work.
- 24% of respondents said that they had completed a training such vocational training, apprenticeship, or trade-specific training experience.
- 36% or respondents said that they have earned a certificate outside of traditional school programs.
- Education is an important topic for the Boone County workforce because 36% of respondents agreed that insufficient education, training, or skills had been a barrier for them when looking for work.

Household characteristics: The average household size was 3.33 people, and 54% of respondents had a child in the home. Forty-five percent of those who had at least one child at home had a child under the age of 18. Most of our respondents, or 48%, were married, and another 24% say that they were not currently with a partner and have never been married.

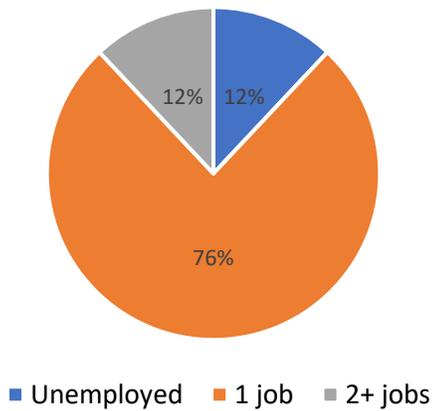
How does our data compare to what is known about the Boone County population?

Our sample was 81% female, where Boone County is 50% female. Median income is roughly \$6000 higher than the Boone County census data. We also had a few respondents at the very high end of the income spectrum (over \$200k). Our sample had a slightly higher educational attainment than the county level data, with 20% more of respondents having a bachelor's degree. Some of these demographic characteristics could alter the data to show more stable work with benefits and underestimate the work precarity index. Our data had about 20% more respondents saying that they have a child in the home compared to the county level data. This could affect some response options, like our data set overstating childcare/family responsibility barriers.

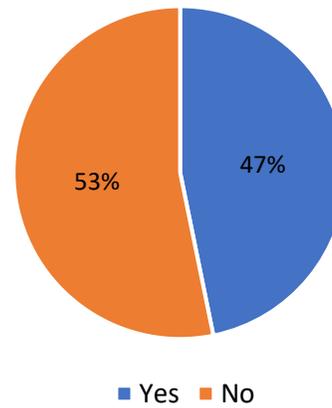
Employment Status

Based on the questions asked in our survey, all participants from Boone County had worked for money at some time in the last 24 months: 76% of people reported working 1 job, 12% reported working 2 or 3 jobs, and 12% were not working at the time that the survey was conducted. 47% of participants' jobs are/were in Boone County and 53% are/were outside of the county.

Number of Jobs at Time of Survey

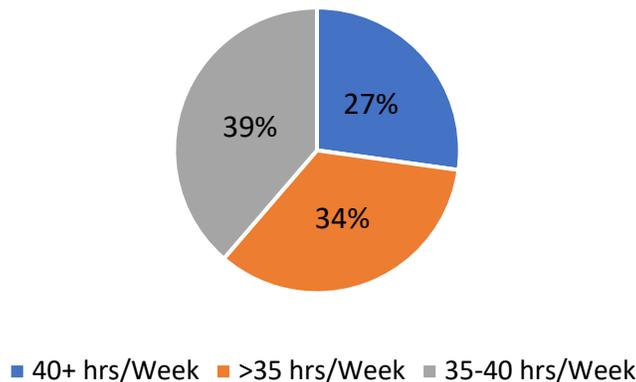


Is/Was your Job in Boone County



Most participants (39%) work/worked between 35-40 hours per week, 34% work/worked less than 35 hours per week, and 27% work/worked more than 40 hours per week.

Number of Hours of Paid Employment



Work Schedule

Of those who were surveyed, 68% reported to “always” know their work schedule at least one week in advance and 16% reported to know it “most of the time”. In addition, 8% participants said they “never” know/knew their work schedule at least one week in advance.

- While 70% of the people do not experience regular changes to their schedule, there are still another 30% who experience changes at least sometimes.
- For the question “how easy or difficult is/was it to take an hour or two off during working hours” the most common responses were “very easy” (36%) and “fairly easy” (30%). However, 13% of participants reported it is/was “very difficult” and 6% reported it to be “impossible”.

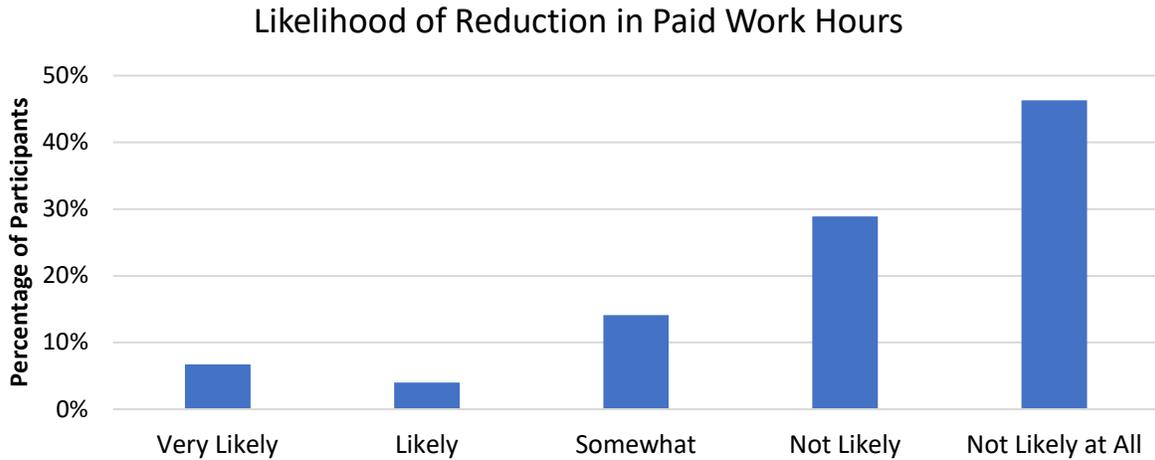
Potential interpretations and implications of these data:

- Considering that most of our survey participants were women, seeing the reports of people working only one job or less than 35 hours per week (part-time) may be due to other responsibilities, such as having to attend to family needs {e.g., picking up kids from school, meal prep, childcare, etc.}.
- While majority of our respondents, reported that they always knew their schedule at least one week in advance, the third of respondents who do not may experience stressors related to last-minute changes to schedules and disruptions to normal routines. This may be especially consequential for those who have children or family members who require direct care.

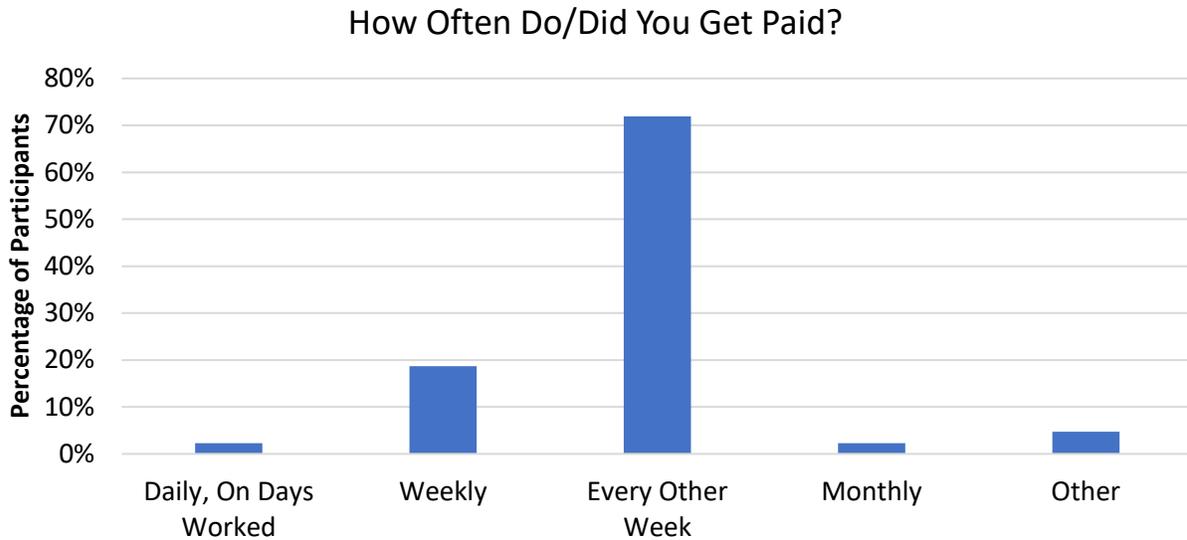


Income/Paid Work

Participants were asked questions that could identify more precarious work situations, such as work that does not provide steady income, likelihood of reduction in paid work hours, cash payments, type of payment for work, and payment frequency.

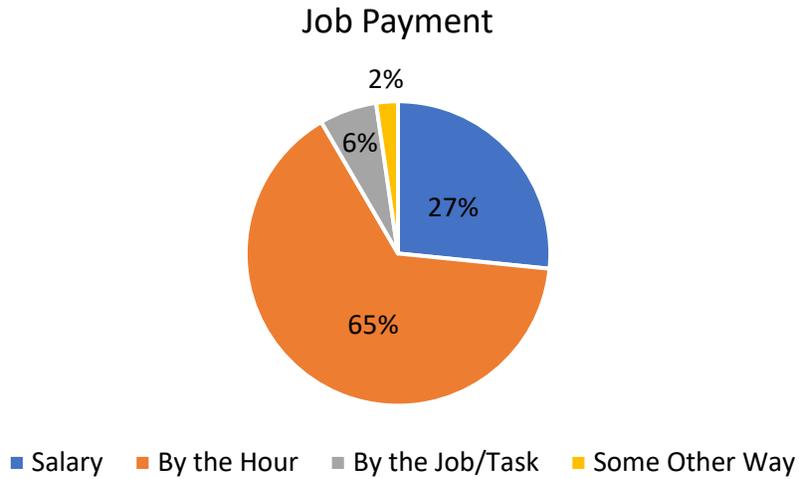


Approximately 25% of survey participants indicated that their paid work hours were at least somewhat likely to be reduced in the following six-month period.

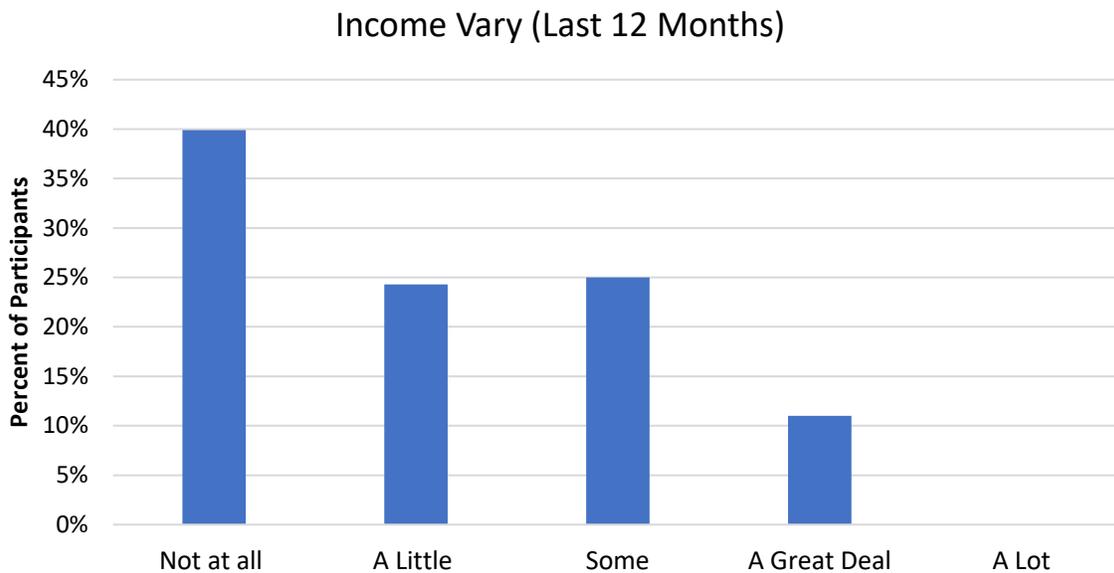


Most survey participants indicated that they are or were typically paid every other week for their work. A small percentage of respondents were paid daily for their work (<5%) and a small percent were paid monthly for their work (<5%).

The chart below shows the results based on how participants are/were paid generally for the work they do/did. The majority (65%) are paid by the hour, 27% by salary, and the less common ones were by the job/task (6%) and some other way (2%).



The graph below reflects survey participants' responses to the question "In the last 12 months, how much did your income vary from week to week?".



Potential interpretations and implications of these data:

- Survey responses were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, and work for many respondents may have been disrupted or less secure than prior to the pandemic. Approximately ¼ of respondents indicated that they felt at risk of work hours reduction in the months following their participation in the survey, which would likely impact their household income and related sense of security in their work.
- Most survey participants indicated that they are paid by hour instead of by salary. Workers that are paid hourly instead of salary may not have dependable steady incomes week-to-week or month-to-month, which could affect their finances and create stress.

Work Benefits

Questions that asked about temporary agencies, health, dental, life and vision care insurance, retirement plan, and paid time off are included in this section.

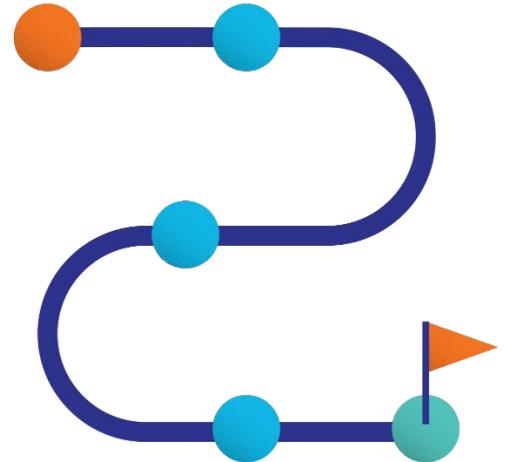
- 51% of workers received employment benefits such as some sort of health insurance, while 49% stated they did not receive any employment benefits.
- When people were asked about benefits at work, 65% reported their employer provides a retirement income plan, 33% reported they do not receive a retirement income plan, and 2% were unsure whether they receive a retirement income plan or not. From our sample 51% of people get/got paid if they miss a day's work, and 49% do not get paid if they miss a day of work.



Commute

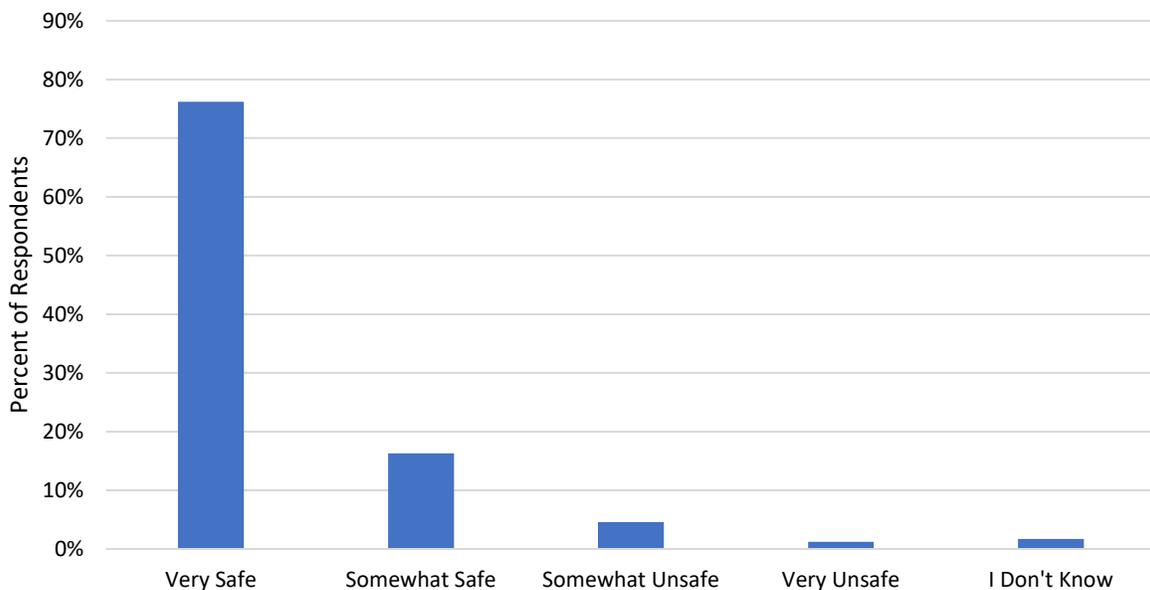
Workers were also asked about their commute experiences. We asked workers to talk about their commute before COVID-19 so that we could capture what the commutes were like before the pandemic. The most reported commute time was approximately 30 minutes roundtrip. Commute times ranged from 5 minutes to 180 minutes roundtrip. Most respondents (81%) say that they drive alone to work. The rest of the ways that workers report traveling to and from work are as follows:

- Drive alone- 81%
- Carpool with coworkers- 3%
- Shared work van or bus that I must pay for- 0%
- Public transport- 1%
- Walk or bike- 3%
- I work from home- 9%
- Other- 3%



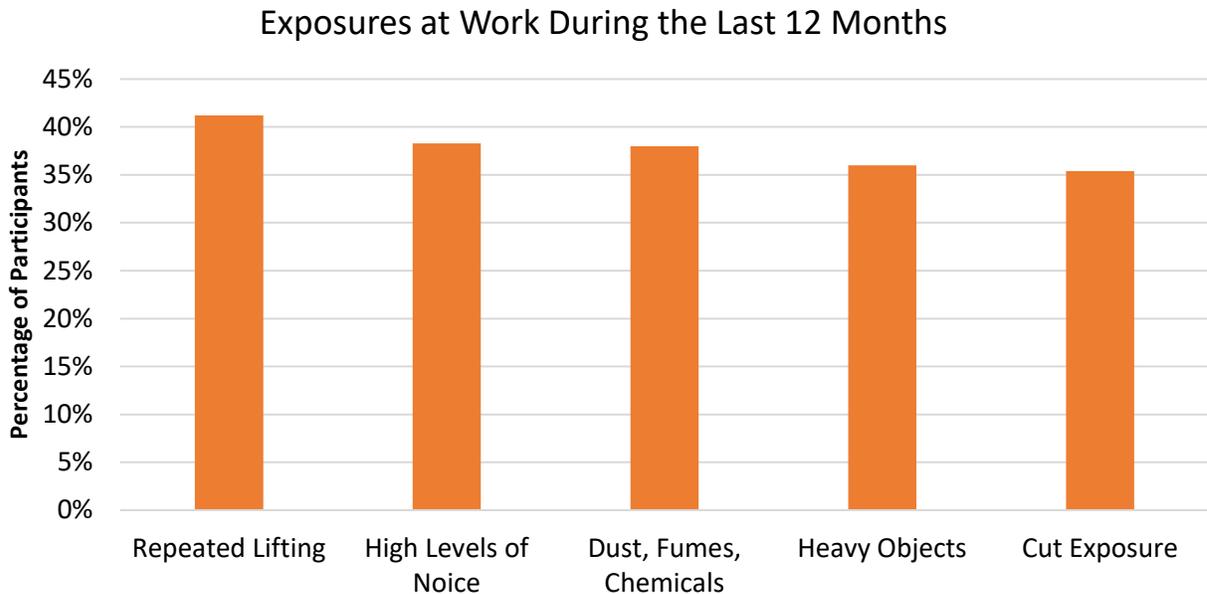
Boone County residents were also asked about how safe they feel or felt on their commute to and from work. Most workers felt very safe, but there were still some that felt unsafe on their commute. The responses can be viewed in the graph below.

How Safe Respondents Felt on Their Commute



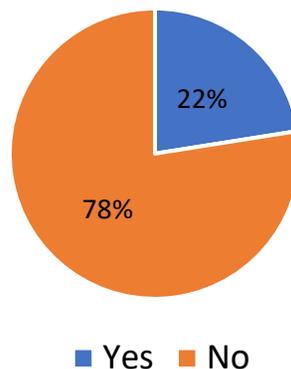
Exposures at Work

Workers that were surveyed answered a list of questions that asked about different types of exposures at work. These questions were “yes” or “no” questions; participants would say “yes” if they were/are exposed to a given hazard at work, or “no” if they were/are not exposed to the hazard at work. The graph below shows the 5 most common exposures that survey participants reported at work.



In addition to these top 5 exposures that were the most common, 31% of participants reported to have slippery surfaces at work and fewer than 30% respondents said that they were exposed to infectious materials and the lowest exposure reported was pesticides with 5%. Participants were asked about fears of violence at work, and 22% of respondents reported that they were afraid of violence at work.

Afraid of Violence While Working



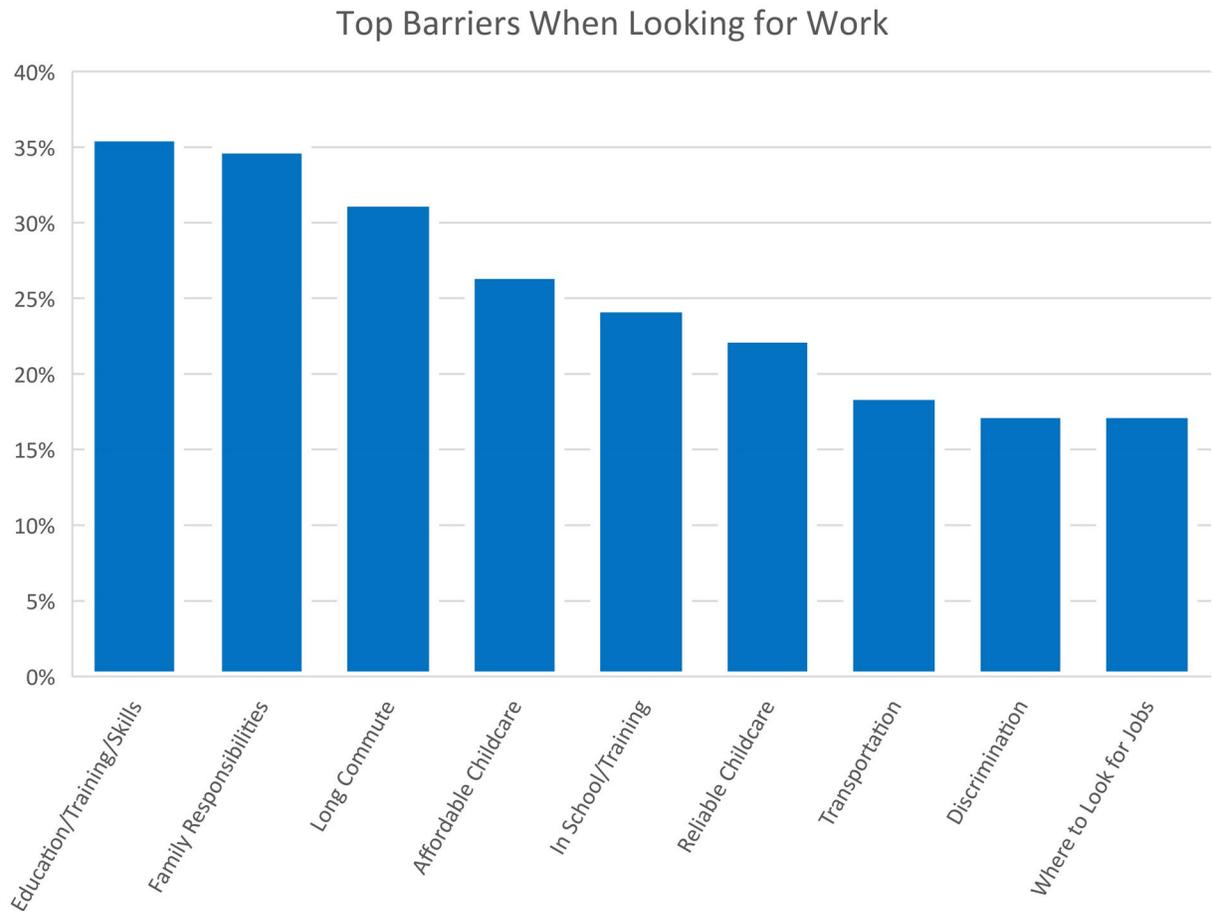
Additionally, the following questions about harassment were asked to participants:

- In the past 12 months, did you experience sexual harassment at work?
- In the past 12 months, did you experience other kinds of harassment, bullying, or other threatening behavior at work?

98% of respondents reported they did not experience sexual harassment at work and 2% said they did. 84% reported they did not experience other kinds of harassment, bullying or other threatening behaviors at work and 16% reported experiencing at least one of these.

Barriers to Work

Survey participants were asked 17 questions that sought to understand different barriers that Boone County residents have faced when looking for work. The graph below shows the top 9 barriers that Boone County residents have faced when seeking work.



The most common barrier reported was lack of education, training, and/or skills with 36% of the respondents reporting this issue when seeking work. The next most common barrier that was reported was family responsibilities (35%). Transportation and commute were also a commonly reported barrier with 31% agreeing that a long commute was an issue and 19% attributing the barrier to transportation. Affordable and reliable childcare also affected Boone County workers with 27% attributing the barrier to affordable childcare and 22% saying that it was reliable childcare. Some other reported barriers were being in a school/training program (24%), discrimination (17%), and not knowing where to look for jobs (17%).

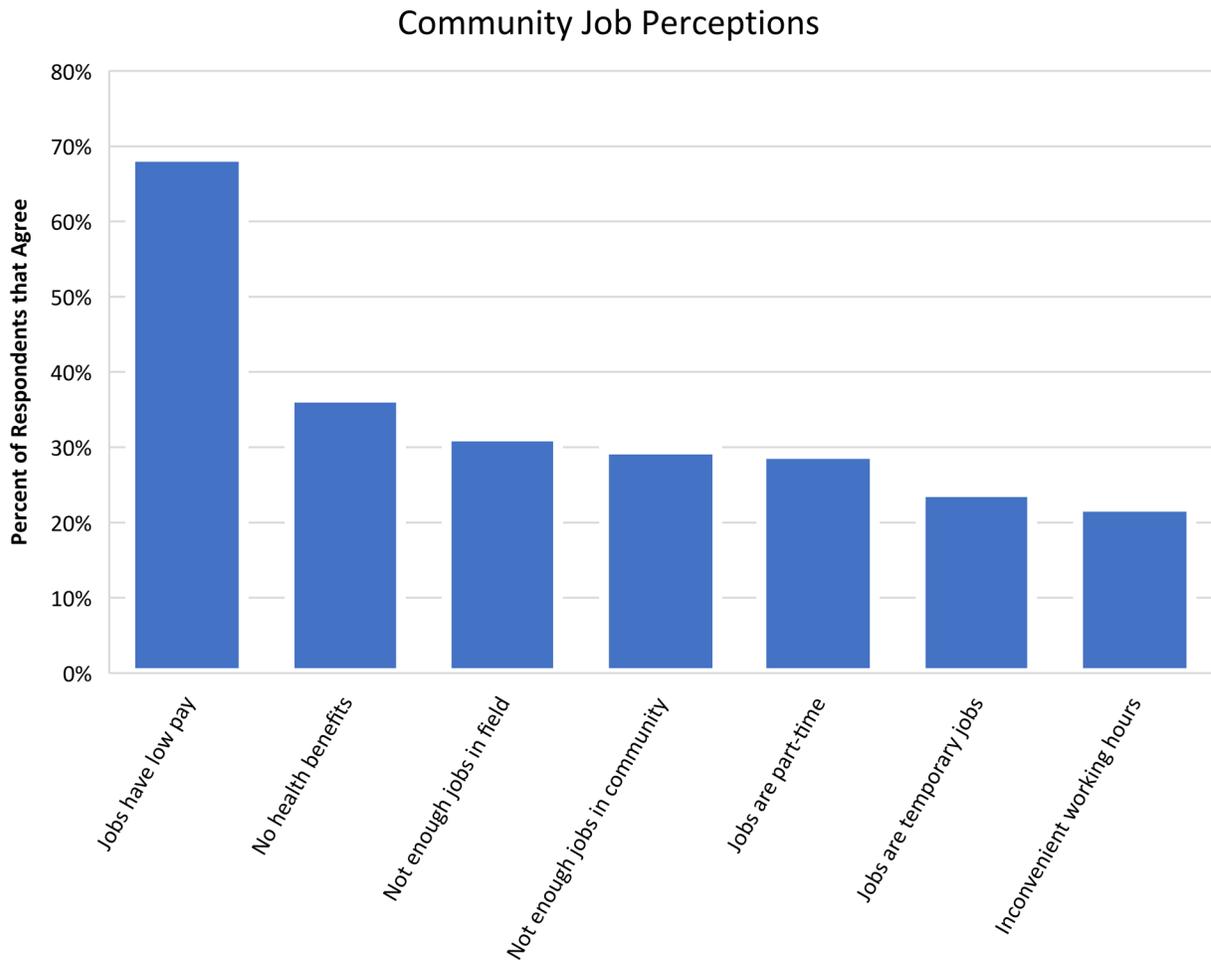
Potential interpretations and implications of these data:

- While our respondents, on average, had a higher educational attainment than the county level data, it is important to note that only 39% had a bachelor's degree. This could explain why education, training, and/or skills were the top reported barrier. Family responsibilities, reliable childcare, and affordable childcare could have to do from when the survey was administered.
- During COVID-19, many children had to learn from home, which could ultimately present itself as a barrier when seeking work if options to work from home were not present. Our sample was also majority female, and if childcare responsibilities fell onto them this could explain this barrier.



Perceptions of Jobs in Boone County

Workers that were surveyed had different perceptions about the job market and their personal experiences of work in Boone County. One common theme among workers was the perception of low pay in the community. Nearly 2/3 of respondents, or 69%, agreed that Boone County has low pay. The second most common perception, with 37% of respondents agreeing, was that the available jobs in Boone County do not have health benefits. Many workers also believed that there were not enough jobs in their field (31%) and that there were not enough jobs in their community overall (30%). The summary of responses is included in the graph below.

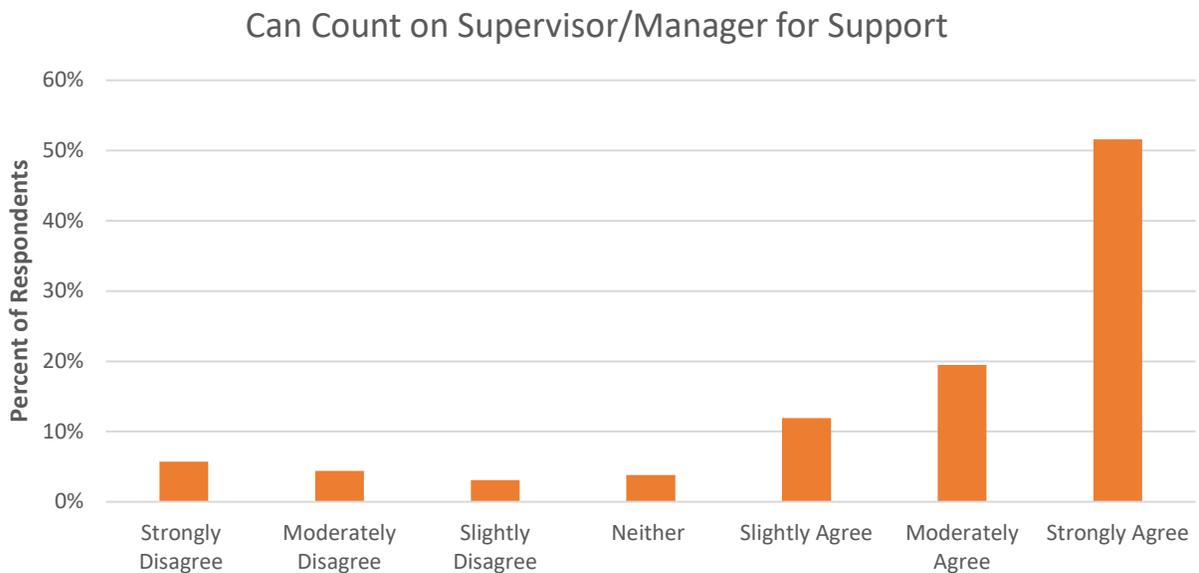


Personal Job & Life Experiences

Boone County residents were asked about personal and job experiences. These statements asked about personal experiences while working, personal life, and perceived support. Some of these statements that respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with included:

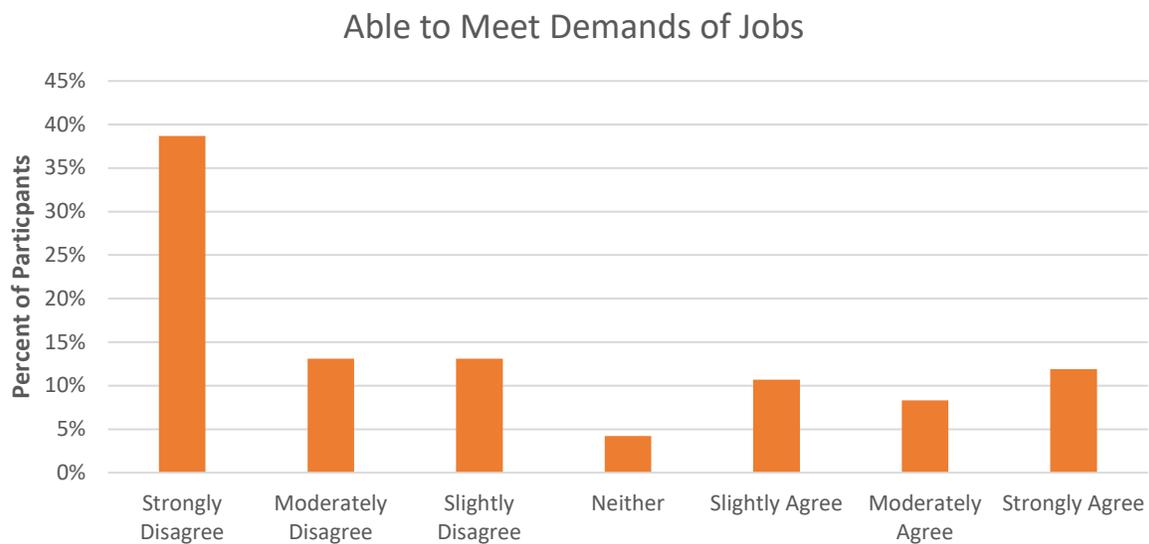
- *“I feel that I have an adequate balance between my work and personal life.”* 76% agreed.
- *“All in all, I am satisfied with my job.”* 85% agreed.
- *“I have a clear understanding of what is expected of me in my job.”* 95% agreed.
- *“I feel I can count on my coworkers/work colleagues for support when I need it.”* 93% agreed.
- *“I feel I have a lot of control over how I do my job.”* 86% agreed.
- *“I can count on my friends/family for support when I need it.”* 91% agreed.
- *“I often feel that I am unable to meet the demands in my personal/family life.”* 38% agreed.
- *“All in all, I am satisfied with my personal/family life.”* 91% agreed.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: I feel I can/could count on my supervisor/manager for support when I need it.



While most respondents (52%) strongly agreed with this statement, the bar graph shows the variance in responses. 6% of respondents strongly disagreed, and another 4% moderately disagreed. Overall, 83% of the Boone County residents that were surveyed agreed to some extent, which leaves 17% of respondents that did not agree. This shows an area in need of improvement for the Boone County workforce.

Respondents were also asked to rate their level of agreement related to their ability to meet the demands asked of them at work. The graph below shows that 39% of Boone County workers in our survey strongly disagreed about feeling able to meet the demands of their job. The amount of agreement with the statement varies widely. Most respondents (65%) disagreed to some extent. The graph shows that while most strongly disagreed, the rest of the responses were almost equally distributed.

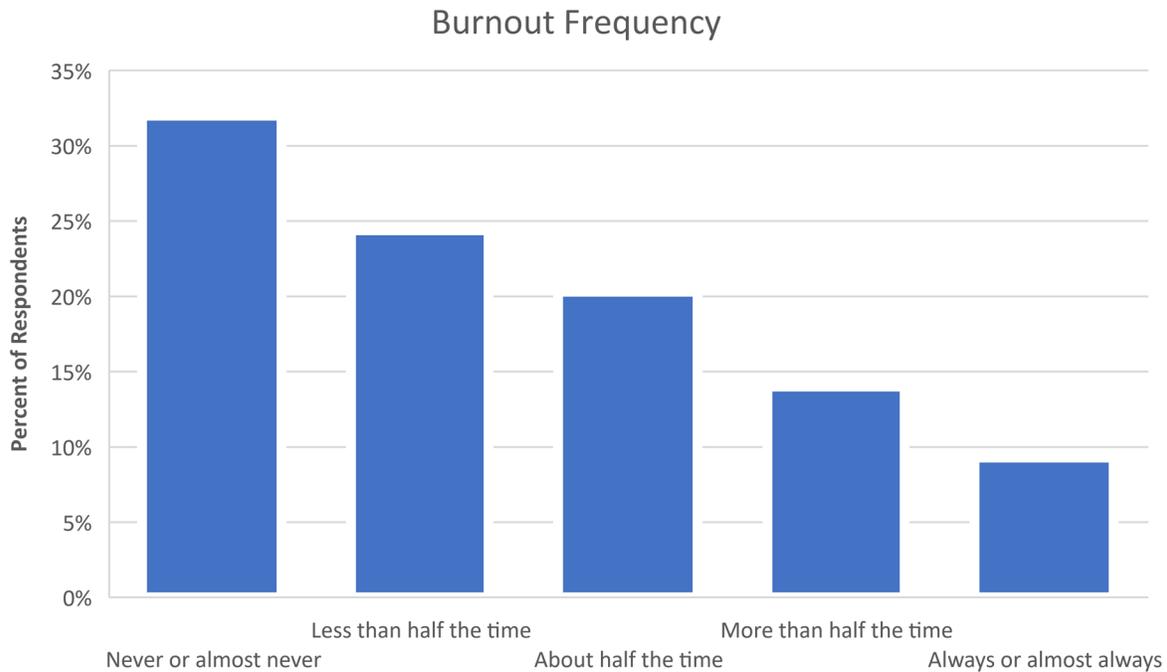


Burnout is another important measurement that we sought to understand in Boone County. Participants were given the following question:

“Feelings of burnout occur when an individual feels emotionally exhausted, cynical, and feels a lack of personal accomplishment. In the past month, how often have you experienced feelings of burnout?”

The responses can be viewed below. While most participants (32%) experienced burnout never or almost never, there are still a wide range of responses. As the frequency of burnout increases, the percent of respondents that feel it decreases. However, it is still important to

examine the distribution and the substantial amount of Boone County workers that often experience burnout. 14% of workers experienced burnout more than half the time during the last month, and 9% experienced it always or almost always. The chart below shows the different responses.



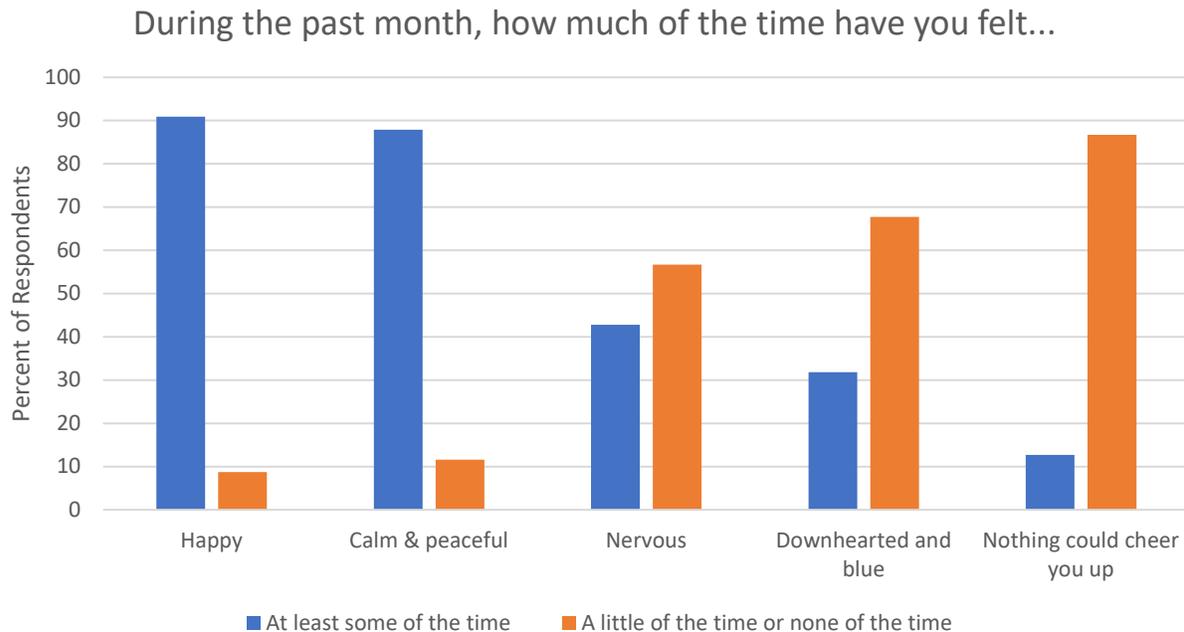
Potential interpretations and implications of these data:

- The 38% of respondents who agreed that they are unable to meet the demands in their personal/family life could have to do with the gender distribution of our sample. Burnout could also be explained by Covid-19 and navigating family responsibilities during the pandemic. Precarious jobs that have unpredictable pay and lack of benefits could also explain the burnout distribution. The high percentage that felt that they were unable to meet the demands of their jobs could have to do with labor shortages.



Mental and Physical Health

Survey participants were asked questions about their mental health. They were asked to about how often they had felt a particular way over the past month. The response distribution for these questions can be viewed in the chart below.



Survey participants were also asked to share the number of days in the previous month that they had experienced issues that negatively impacted their emotional well-being over the last month. On average, participants experienced issues that negatively impacted their emotional well-being on 9 days of the previous month.

Similarly, survey participants were asked to share the number of days that they experienced issues that negatively impacted their physical health. On average, participants experienced issues that negatively impacted their physical health on 6 days of the previous month.

Finally, survey participants were asked about how many days poor physical or emotional health kept them from doing their usual activities such as self-care, work, or recreation. The average number of days that poor physical or emotional health kept participants from doing normal activities was 4 days.

Potential interpretations and implications of these data:

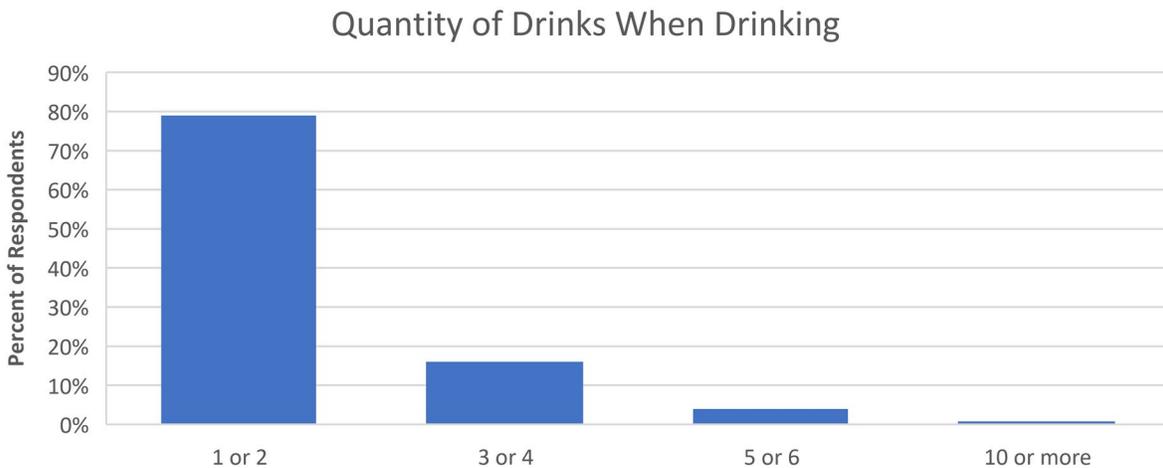
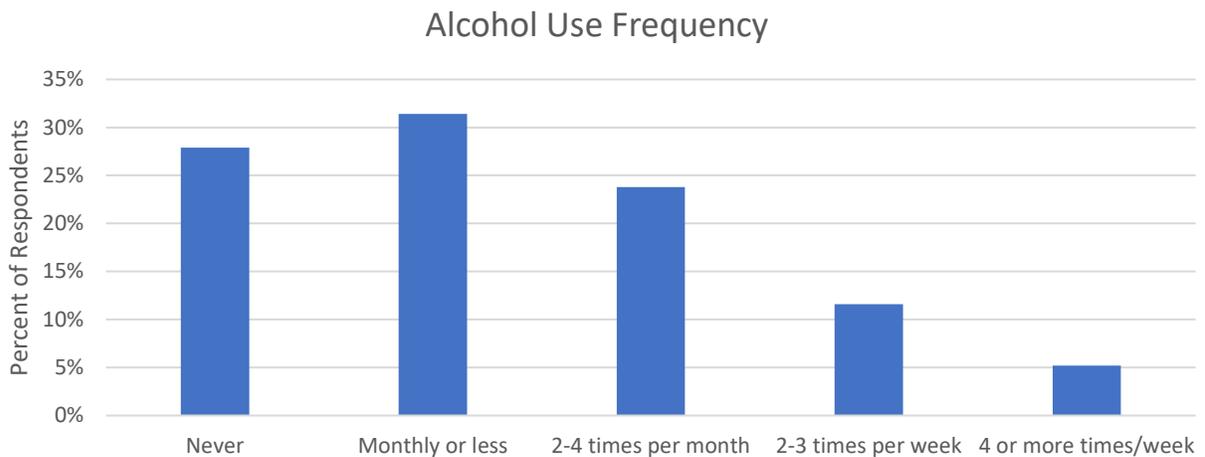
- The high average of poor mental health days could be explained by the pandemic. Many of these surveys were collected during the winter months during the peak of the pandemic.

Alcohol & Substance Use

The survey asked residents about their experiences and habits regarding alcohol and other substances. This section presents the results and highlights the potential areas for interventions in the county.

Alcohol Use

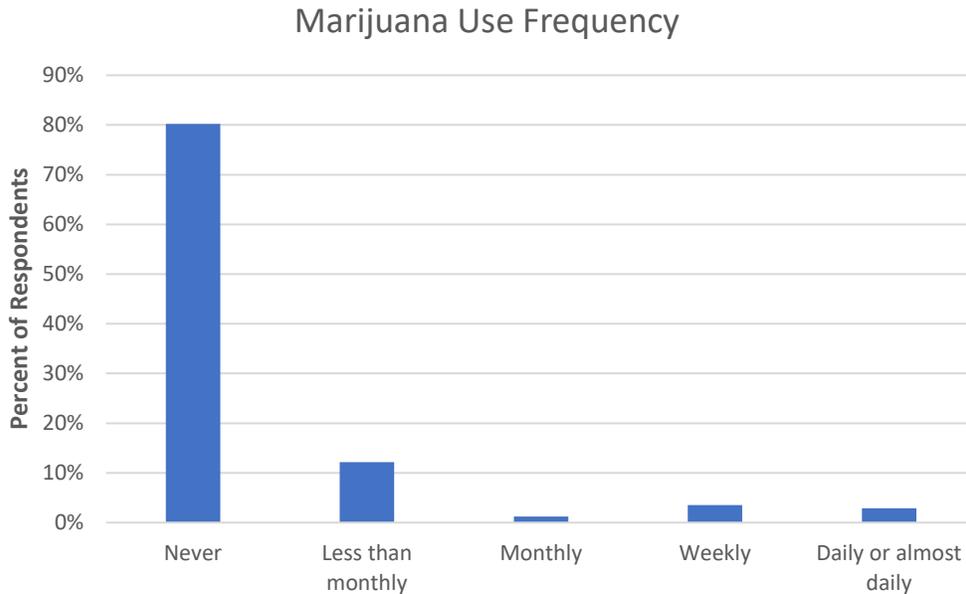
To understand the prevalence of alcohol use, we asked the respondents how often they had a drink containing alcohol and how many drinks they had on a typical day that they were drinking. The results can be viewed in the charts below.



28% of survey participants said that their alcohol consumption had **increased** since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 15% said they had been **drinking more when they do drink** since the start of the pandemic.

Marijuana

Survey respondents were also asked about their marijuana use. While a majority (80%) said that they never used marijuana, nearly 1/5 admitted to using it at least less than monthly. Only 6% of usage was medical, 65% was recreational, and 29% was both medical and recreational. The marijuana use frequency distribution can be viewed below.



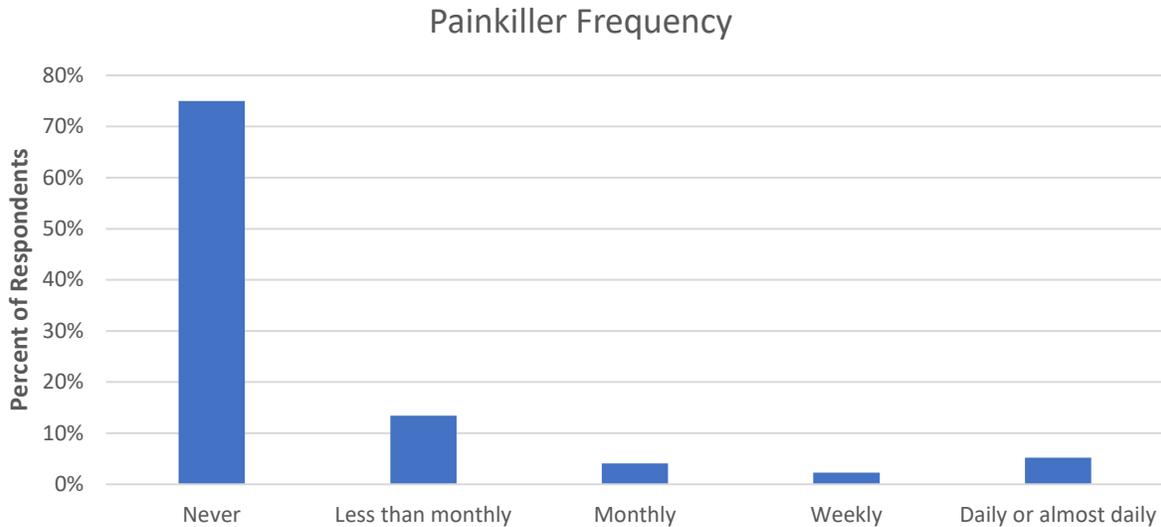
Some common reasons for using marijuana included:

- To get to sleep (4%)
- To feel good or get high (6%)
- To relax or relieve tension (9%)
- To treat a medical condition (2%)
- To have a good time with my friends (4%)

COVID-19 appeared to influence marijuana use. 41% agreed to using more marijuana since the beginning of the pandemic, with another 15% saying that they used more marijuana when they did use it since the start of COVID-19.

Painkillers

The following chart shows how often Boone County residents were using painkillers (prescription and/or non-prescription):



Of those respondents that admitted to using painkillers within the last 12 months, 30% said that they were using them without a prescription. Another 9% said that they were using them in larger amounts, more frequently, for longer than prescribed, or for another reason than prescribed by their doctor.

Reasons for using painkillers without a prescription included:

- To relax or relieve tension (2%)
- To get through the day (1%)
- To get to sleep (1%)
- Other- (Headaches- 1%, Injuries/pain relief-1%, Pain 1%)

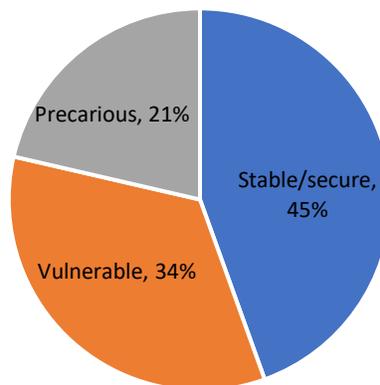
14% of survey participants said that they were using painkillers more often since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and 9.3% said they were using them more often when they were using them.

Employment Precarity & Mental Health

Employment Precarity

Using participant responses to questions about their employment situations – summarized in the employment status, work schedule, income, and exposures sections of this report – we were able to classify participants into three levels of relative precariousness, or overall quality and security, of their work situations. Survey participants were categorized as either precarious (lowest job quality and employment security), vulnerable, or stable/secure (highest job quality and employment security). These categories and the process of classifying responses into these categories was originally developed by the [Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario \(PEPSO\) group](#). Proportions of survey participants in each group are displayed in the graph below:

Employment Precarity Classifications



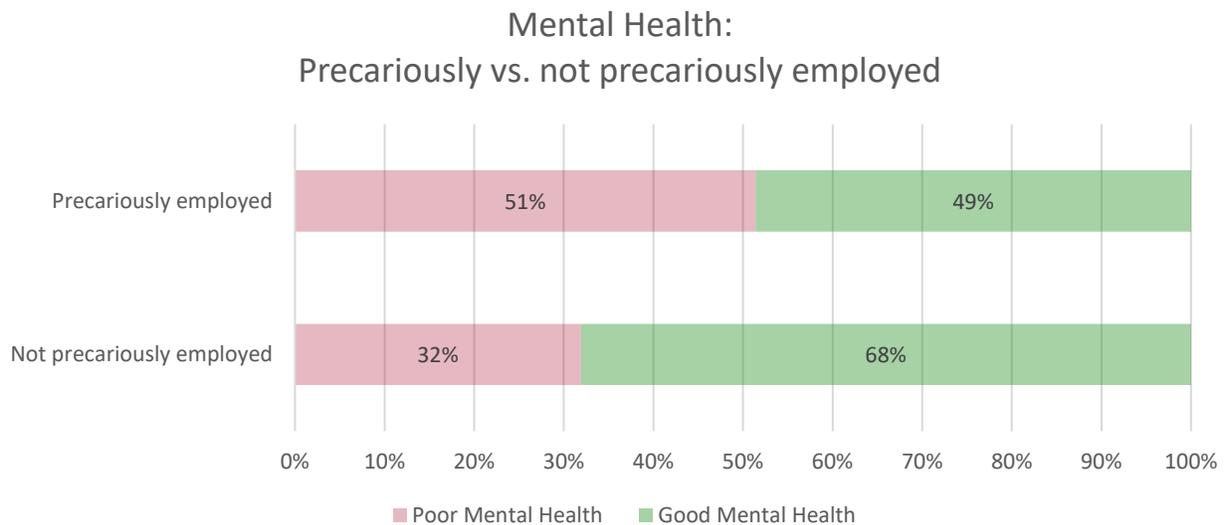
Slightly fewer than half of participants were classified as having stable/secure, or high quality and high security employment, while approximately 1/5 of participants were classified as having precarious employment.

Mental Health

In addition to classifying survey participants into employment precarity categories, we examined the relationship between employment precarity and mental health of survey participants. We compared individuals in the most precarious employment situations to those in higher quality and security employment situations.

Using survey participants' responses to the five mental health questions, summarized in the mental and physical health section of this report, we were able to group participants into two

mental health categories: “good mental health” and “poor mental health”. These five mental health questions are part of a validated instrument, known as the [MHI-5](#), used for assessing mental health in adults. The proportion of participants who are precariously employed and who have good or poor mental health is compared to the proportion of participants who are not precariously employed and who have good or poor mental health is summarized in the graph below:



A higher percentage of participants who are precariously employed were identified as having poor mental health compared to participants who are not precariously employed.

Potential interpretations and implications of these data:

- Precariousness of employment may be an important risk factor for poor mental health and needs to be further explored in future, long-term research studies.