

## Food Security and Housing during COVID

In securing access to food and housing during the pandemic, OW/ODSP recipients faced the most hurdles, while respondents who did not receive governmental support faced the least. CERB recipients fell between these extremes, but generally were closer to non-recipients on food security and to OW/ODSP recipients on questions of housing security. While the incomes of OW/ODSP recipients did not change with the pandemic, it does appear that their situation worsened. One respondent noted, “On ODSP, it’s a constant worry about bills, bill collectors, food and housing.”

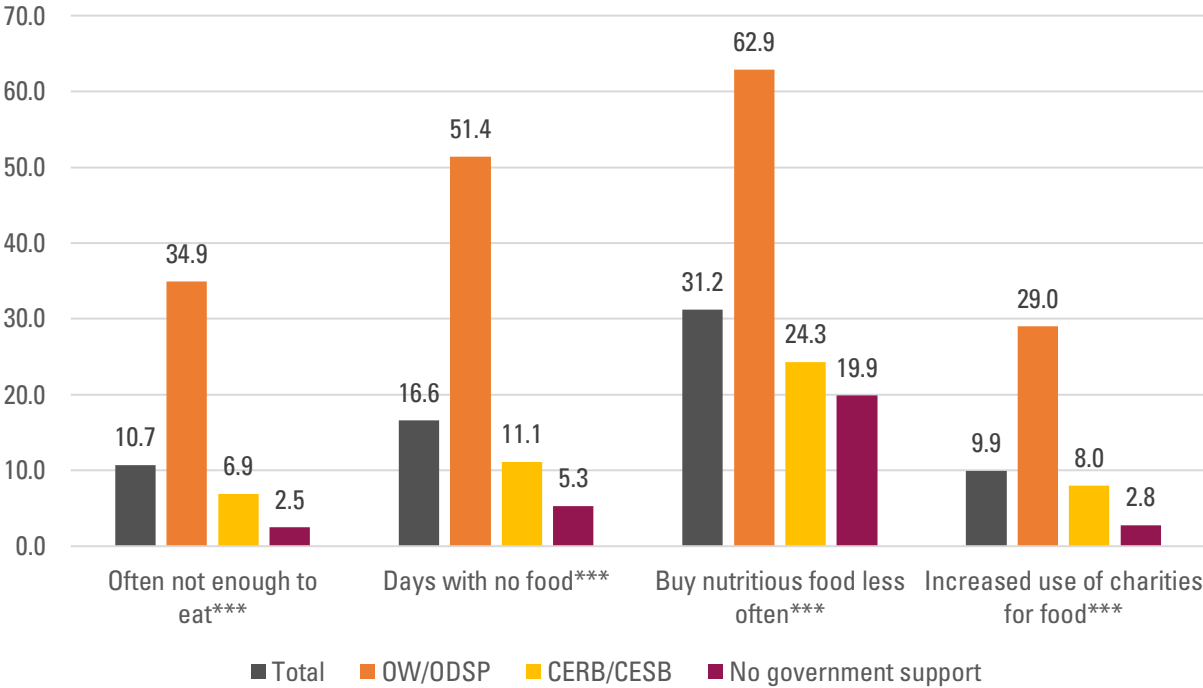
### Food Security

At the basic level of access to food, there was a stark difference between OW/ODSP respondents, a third of whom reported often not having enough to eat, compared to the vast majority of respondents receiving CERB or no support who always had enough to eat (Chart 1). Half of OW/ODSP respondents reported days where they had no food to eat, compared to one in ten CERB respondents and one in twenty who received no support. There were small differences between men and women and between white and racialized respondents, but none were statistically significant (Chart 2).

*I struggle monthly with buying proper meat, fruits and vegetables and am forced to fill up on cheaper foods like pasta and potatoes and thus causing weight gain which causes more health problems and requires more care and medicine — Middle-aged female CPP-Disability recipient*

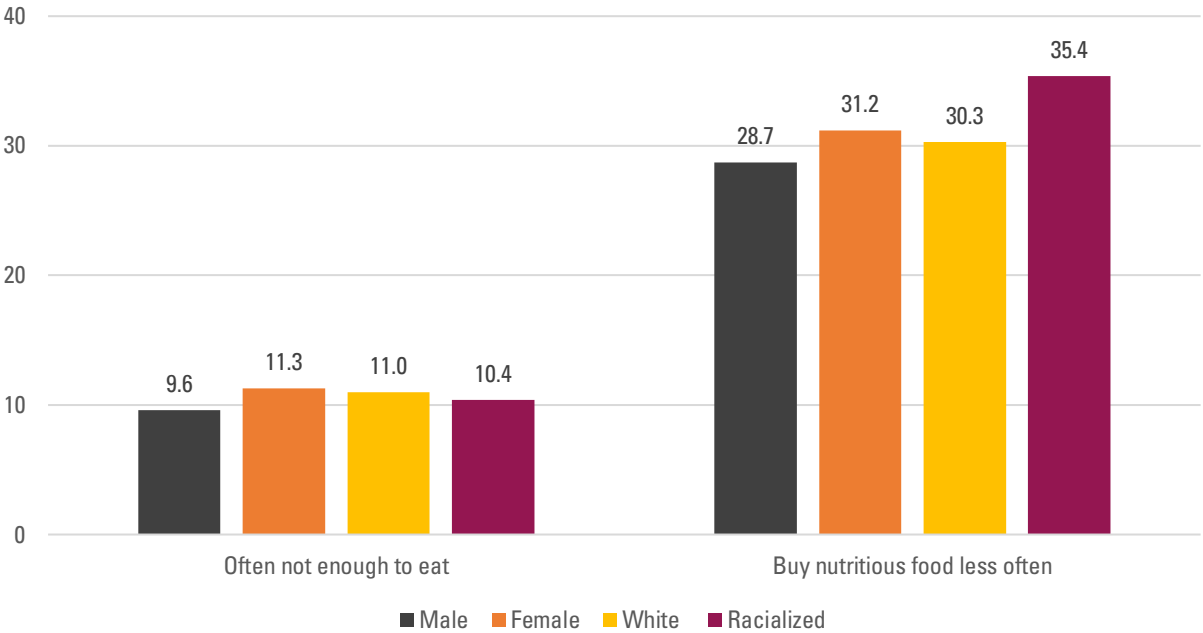
The pandemic did affect access to nutritious food, with all groups buying nutritious food less often rather than more often. There was a gradient here, with CERB recipients being slightly more likely to report buying less often than those who received no support, but with OW/ODSP recipients being three times as likely to report buying less often than the no support group. This gradient was repeated in food bank and food charity use, where CERB recipients and those receiving no support saw little net change, but where over a quarter of OW/ODSP respondents ended up making more use of these charities (and about a seventh made less use).

**Chart 1: Food and COVID by type of government support (%)**



\* p<.10 \*\* p<=.05 \*\*\*p<=.001

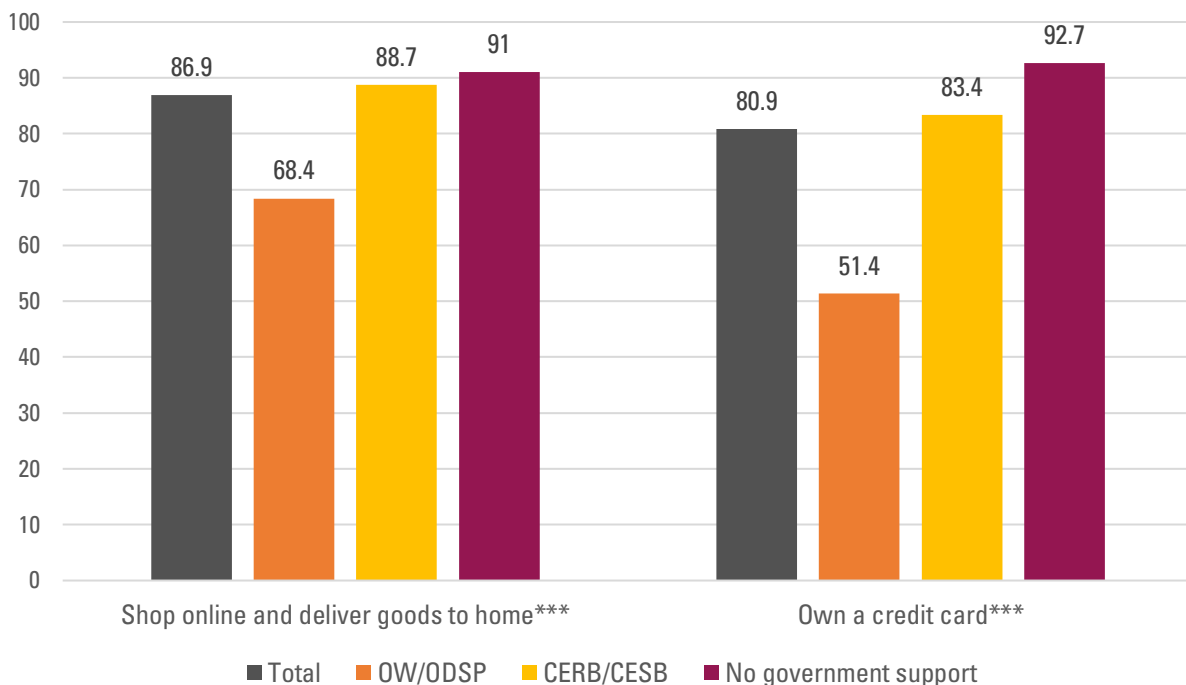
**Chart 2: Food and COVID by gender and race (%)**



*While we were able to shop for groceries online and arrange curbside pickup (no delivery unfortunately), I cannot stress how poor the online food shopping experience is/was, particularly at the beginning. It seemed almost impossible to get fresh fruit and vegetables, and substitutions were made and/or items were missing on nearly every order ... As a result, the quality of the food that we have been eating is much poorer than before the pandemic — Older female working in higher education*

With the economic shutdown in March, access to grocery stores, restaurants and food charities became more complicated. This was a particularly difficult situation for immunocompromised people, a group overrepresented among ODSP recipients. Only half of our respondents who were OW/ODSP recipients owned a credit card, as compared to over 80 percent and 90 percent of the CERB and no support groups respectively (Chart 3). While the majority of respondents managed to shop online and have goods delivered to them, this was not true of a third of OW/ODSP recipients. Only one in ten respondents in the other groups did not shop online or access home delivery (Chart 3).

**Chart 3: Access to shopping during COVID by type of government support (% yes)**



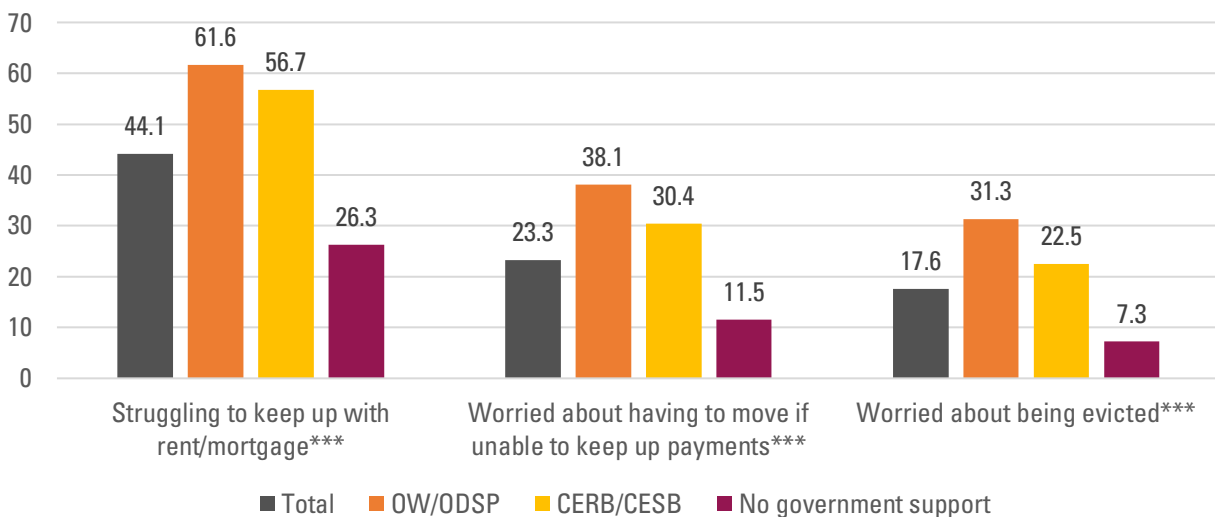
\* p<.10 \*\* p<=.05 \*\*\*p<=.001

## Housing Security

While CERB recipients were closer to those receiving no support when it came to food security, they came closer to OW/ODSP recipients in terms of their subjective assessments of their housing security. Over half of both OW/ODSP and CERB recipients reported struggling to keep up with rent or mortgage payments, compared to only a quarter for those receiving no support. This produced higher levels of concern about the possibility of eviction or having to move due to not being able to keep up with rent, even with the eviction ban in place from March 16 to September 14, 2020. Compared to the no support group, CERB recipients were about three times more likely to be concerned about being evicted or about having to move. OW/ODSP recipients in turn were over four times as worried about eviction and three times as worried about having to move. Just under 1 in 3 OW/ODSP respondents and just under 1 in 4 CERB respondents expressed worry about eviction. The comments of CERB recipients nevertheless indicate that they saw the CERB as crucial to keeping themselves housed. As one respondent noted, “without the CERB we may have lost our house, or worse.” There were small differences between men and women reporting difficulty keeping up with rent or mortgages. The gap was wider between white and racialized respondents, with white respondents being statistically less likely to report such problems (Chart 5).

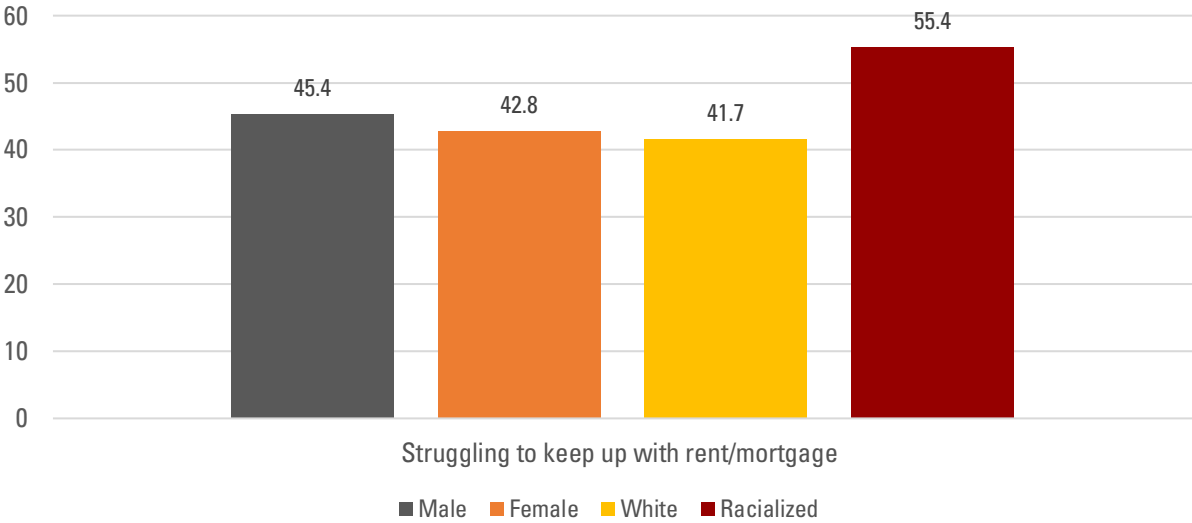
*We have had family members move in with us due to lack of housing, causing crowding, all due to lack of financial response from all levels of government — Older female working in non-profit social sector*

Chart 4: Housing and COVID by type of government support (%)



\* p<.10 \*\* p<=.05 \*\*\*p<=.001

Chart 5: Housing and COVID by gender and race (%)



This factsheet is co-authored by Mohammad Ferdosi, Dr. Peter Graefe, Dr. Wayne Lewchuk and Dr. Stephanie Ross, who are the co-investigators in the **COVID Economic and Social Effects Study (CESES)** at McMaster University. CESES is a collaboration between the School of Labour Studies, the Department of Political Science, and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and is supported by funding from MITACS and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. For other factsheets in the series, go to the CESES project website: <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/research/covid19-impact>