Single Female Head of Households

Hopes and Challenges for the Future

September 2021
Single Female Head of Households Study Overview

Objectives:
To better understand the single female head of household (SFHOH) population, including learning more about their overall housing and financial situations, identifying meaningful differences among demographic cohorts, and determining how recent events have impacted wealth building and long-term views towards homeownership.

Methodology:

SURVEY
A nationally representative online survey April 14-23, 2021, among 2,000 American single female heads of household, aged 18 and older.

FOCUS POPULATION
Respondents were screened from the general population. All confirmed they are currently unmarried and have their residence in their name only (or in their name and the name of someone who is not their significant other).

DATA ANALYSIS
These data were weighted and scaled.
Key Takeaways

1. About two in five SFHOHs are renters. Black and Hispanic SFHOHs face more challenges than White SFHOHs – particularly if they are renting. These women are more likely to be cost-burdened, as compared to owners. About one in five renters allocates more than 50% of her income toward rent. Younger generations are more racially and ethnically diverse than Baby Boomers, and they are more likely to have dependent children to support and experience discrimination.

2. Events over the past two years have disrupted wealth building among SFHOH. Many women had their work situation disrupted during the pandemic. Among those that dropped out of the workforce, 75% have not yet returned. Black and Hispanic women more frequently struggle to provide for their household and fear they will not recover financially in the next year – if ever. Gen X and younger also struggle financially and feel stressed about the future.

3. Given all the challenges, many see homeownership as out of reach and the past two years may impact their long-term ability to achieve that dream. Among women currently renting, about three in ten do not believe they will ever be able to afford to buy a home. They lack confidence in their knowledge about the homebuying process and see a down payment and closing costs as their most significant obstacle to homeownership.
Who Are They?
Most SFHOH were previously married, have at least some college education, are employed and own a home.

### Marital status

- Never married: 41%
- Divorced or separated: 38%
- Widowed: 21%

### Education

- HS or less: 40%
- Some college: 32%
- College or more: 28%

### Generation

- Gen Z: 5%
- Millennial: 22%
- Gen X: 22%
- Boomer: 41%
- Silent: 10%

### Race/Ethnicity

- White: 57%
- Black: 24%
- Hispanic: 12%
- Other/2+: 7%

### Own/Rent

- 57% Own
- 43% Rent

### Employment & Income

- 57% employed
- 41% <250% FPL
Just over half of SFHOHs live with others; one in six is the parent of a minor child who lives with her.

Do any of the following people currently live with you?

- Live alone
- Live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
- Live with own minor or adult child(ren)

For all SFHOHs:
- 29% live alone
- 46% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
- 25% live with own minor or adult child(ren)

For different age groups and ethnicities:

- Gen Z:
  - 1% live alone
  - 10% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 3% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- Millennial:
  - 14% live alone
  - 18% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 54% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- Gen X:
  - 17% live alone
  - 24% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 36% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- Boomer+:
  - 67% live alone
  - 49% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 8% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- White:
  - 68% live alone
  - 53% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 40% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- Black:
  - 21% live alone
  - 22% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 35% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- Hispanic:
  - 7% live alone
  - 16% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 18% live with own minor or adult child(ren)
- Other:
  - 5% live alone
  - 9% live with other adult(s)/relative(s) but not own minor or adult child(ren)
  - 6% live with own minor or adult child(ren)

Base: 2000 SFHOHs
In the past year, 32% of SFHOHs report being concerned about discrimination or poor treatment based on personal characteristics, most commonly race/ethnicity. In the past 12 months, have you been concerned about discrimination or afraid of being treated poorly based on your... 

Total Percentage Concerned About Discrimination Based on Any Characteristic 

- 51% of Black SFHOHs 
- 36% of Hispanic SFHOHs 
- 21% of White SFHOHs 

Q: In the past 12 months, have you been concerned about discrimination or afraid of being treated poorly on the basis of your Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Economic background, Marital Status, Status as a single parent, Sexual orientation? Base: 2000 SFHOHs; N=1395 White, N=361 Black, N=138 Hispanic, 850 combined non-White, 644 living with their children.
What’s Their Financial Perspective?
Nearly three in 10 employed before COVID had disruptions to their work schedule during the pandemic

Among those who were employed before the pandemic:

- 29% Report disruptions to work schedules during the pandemic
- 13% Have left the workforce since the pandemic
- 10% Report having to care for child(ren) disrupted their work schedules during the pandemic

When do you plan to return to the workforce?  
(Among those who left the workforce)

- 22% Already have
- 25% When I can find a job
- 19% When children go back to school/childcare
- 14% When COVID isn’t a threat
- 10% Other
- 9% Never
- 1% Not sure
- 13% Other

Q: Since the start of COVID-19, have you left the workforce, reduced the number of hours you work, or taken an unpaid leave of absence from your job for any reason? Was the change in your employment due to specifically being able to care for your child(ren) after disruptions in childcare arrangements or in your child(ren)’s schooling?  
Base: 2000 SFH0Hs; 374 SFH0Hs with children at home
Most SFHOHs have enough money to go beyond each payday, though younger generations are more likely than Boomers to be struggling financially.

Which of the following best describes your household’s general financial situation?

- All SFHOH: 39% Don’t have enough for basics or live payday to payday, 59% Have enough to go beyond each payday (e.g., for things I/we want, for savings)
- Gen X & younger: 47% Don’t have enough for basics or live payday to payday, 52% Have enough to go beyond each payday (e.g., for things I/we want, for savings)
- Boomers: 34% Don’t have enough for basics or live payday to payday, 63% Have enough to go beyond each payday (e.g., for things I/we want, for savings)

Living alone is a financial struggle for me
(Asked only of those living alone)

- All SFHOH: 28% Agree
- Gen X & younger: 36% Agree
- Boomers: 27% Agree

Providing for people who live with me is a financial struggle
(Asked only of those living with others)

- All SFHOH: 33% Agree
- Gen X & younger: 36% Agree
- Boomers: 26% Agree

Q: Which of the following statements best describes your household’s general financial situation? Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Living alone is a financial struggle for me; Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Providing for people who live with me is a financial struggle.
Base: 2000 SFHOHs (1079 living alone; 911 living with others); 1005 Boomers; 754 Gen X & younger
Younger generations feel more stressed and anxious, while Boomers are more likely to be hopeful about the future.

**Gen X & Younger**

54% report their finances were not impacted by COVID or have already recovered. 25% will not recover within the year, if ever.

Feelings about the future:
- Hopeful: 63%
- Cautious: 38%
- Stressed: 29%
- Anxious: 38%
- Happy: 24%

**Baby Boomers**

69% report their finances were not impacted by COVID or have already recovered. 19% will not recover within the year, if ever.

Feelings about the future:
- Hopeful: 72%
- Cautious: 51%
- Stressed: 15%
- Anxious: 23%
- Happy: 31%

Q: How long do you think it will take you to recover financially from COVID-19's impact on your personal finances? Base: 2000 SFHOHs; N=1005 Boomer, N=754 Gen X + younger

Q: How are you feeling about life these days? Please select the three words that best describe your feelings about your life right now. When you think about your life in the future, please select the three words that best describe your feelings about your future. Base: 2000 SFHOHs; N=1005 Boomer, N=754 Gen X + younger
Black and Hispanic SFHOHs are more likely to struggle financially than White SFHOHs

Which of the following best describes your household’s general financial situation?

- Don’t have enough for basics or live payday to payday
- Have enough to go beyond each payday (e.g., for things I/we want, for savings)

SFHOH Renter Perceived Financial Situation

Q: Which of the following statements best describes your household’s general financial situation? Base: 2000 SFHOH; N=1395 White, N=361 Black, N=138 Hispanic; N=431 White renters, N=233 Black or Hispanic renters
Living alone or with others are both financial struggles for SFHOH – particularly among Hispanic SFHOH

Living alone is a financial struggle for me
(Asked only of those living alone)

- 27% Agree
  - White
- 25% Agree
  - Black
- 41% Agree
  - Hispanic

Providing for people who live with me is a financial struggle
(Asked only of those living with others)

- 31% Agree
  - White
- 33% Agree
  - Black
- 38% Agree
  - Hispanic

Q: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Living alone is a financial struggle for me. Base: 1079 SFHOH; N=828 White, N=168 Black, N=43 Hispanic (note small base size);
Q: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Providing for people who live with me is a financial struggle. Base: 911 SFHOH; N= 565 White, N=188 Black, N=95 Hispanic (note small base size)
Hispanic SFHOHs are less hopeful about the future, while Black SFHOHs are the most likely to feel happy

White SFHOHs

71% report their finances were not impacted by COVID or have already recovered.
16% will not recover within the year, if ever.

Feelings about the future:

- Hopeful: 69%
- Cautious: 49%
- Stressed: 24%
- Anxious: 34%
- Happy: 25%

Black SFHOHs

53% report their finances were not impacted by COVID or have already recovered.
29% will not recover within the year, if ever.

Feelings about the future:

- Hopeful: 70%
- Cautious: 38%
- Stressed: 16%
- Anxious: 21%
- Happy: 35%

Hispanic SFHOHs

49% report their finances were not impacted by COVID or have already recovered.
28% will not recover within the year, if ever.

Feelings about the future:

- Hopeful: 62%
- Cautious: 38%
- Stressed: 22%
- Anxious: 24%
- Happy: 23%

Q: How long do you think it will take you to recover financially from COVID-19’s impact on your personal finances? Base: 2000 SFHOHs; N=1395 White, N=361 Black, N=138 Hispanic

Q: How are you feeling about life these days? Please select the three words that best describe your feelings about your life right now; When you think about your life in the future, please select the three words that best describe your feelings about your future. Base: 2000 SFHOHs; N=1395 White, N=361 Black, N=138 Hispanic
What Are the Forward-Looking Impacts?
Many SFHOH renters are considering buying upon their next move, though many are unaware of what’s required for a down payment.

- 53% of SFHOH renters are spending >30% on their rent.
  - White: 55%
  - Black: 52%
  - Hispanic: 55%

- 39% of SFHOH renters expect to buy upon their next move.
  - White: 31%
  - Black: 45%
  - Hispanic: 59%

- 44% of SFHOH renters don’t know how much is required for a down payment.
  - White: 39%
  - Black: 55%
  - Hispanic: 41%

AQ15. What percentage of your monthly income do you spend on [rent][your mortgage payment] (excluding those who said they don’t have monthly income)?
AQ8. For your next residence, do you expect to...?
AQ9. To the best of your knowledge, what is the percentage of a home’s sale price lenders require borrowers to pay as a down payment for a typical mortgage today?

Base: 700 SFHOH renters; 431 White SFHOH renters; 167 Black SFHOH renters; 66 Hispanic SFHOH renters (note small base size)
SFHOH renters experience many of the standard obstacles to owning a home and some are simply counting themselves out of becoming homeowners altogether.

**Obstacles to Owning a Home**

(% Major/Minor Obstacle)

- **82%** Not enough money for a down payment and closing costs
- **75%** Mortgage would be higher than rent
- **74%** Not earning enough for mortgage payment
- **63%** Not knowing how to start the process
- **56%** Not having established credit history
- **55%** Not knowing someone to help with the process
- **21%** Not having forms in native language

**SFHOH renters agree**

*I can’t afford to buy a home and don’t feel I will ever be able to.*

- **58%**
- **62%** White
- **50%** Black
- **72%** Hispanic

AQ13. If you were considering buying a [different] home today, please indicate if you think the following would be a major obstacle, minor obstacle or no obstacle for you?

Base: 700 SFHOH renters; 431 White SFHOH renters; 167 Black SFHOH renters; 66 Hispanic SFHOH renters (note small base size)
Although the mortgage and homebuying process yields significant trepidation, SFHOH renters feel confident when it comes to managing their finances and building credit.

Confidence in Knowledge of Finances and Home Buying/Owning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total Renters</th>
<th>Renters Planning to Buy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to build my credit</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing personal finances and credit</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities that come with owning a home</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to avoid lending scams</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to avoid foreclosure</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>The overall home buying process</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest rates</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The overall mortgage process</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The types of mortgage loans available</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AQ14. How confident do you feel in your knowledge of each of the following?  
Base: 700 SFHOH renters; 219 SFHOH renters who plan to buy their next residence.