

THE COSTS OF ESSENTIAL BABY ITEMS HAVE GONE UP, AND PARENTS ARE FEELING THE TOLL

“We decided to force potty training on my daughter so we would stop having to buy diapers. It was extremely stressful for both of us. She was not ready for it and I didn’t want to force her but it was necessary.”
Parent in California

During 2022 we have seen nationwide increases in the costs of basic essentials. For families with young children, steep increases in the cost of baby items have been especially challenging. As companies have raised prices, families have struggled to keep up.



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Global increases in fuel and transportation costs, shipping delays, labor shortages, and limited access to materials have pushed companies to raise the costs of food, housing, healthcare, child care, utilities, and other essentials. Families can't cut back on these essentials because they need them to work, run their household, and keep their children safe and healthy. In particular, baby supplies are not optional items that parents can cut back on.

This week, we look at RAPID families' experiences with the increasing costs of essentials and how these rising costs have impacted their lives. We focus on babies' basic needs (diapers, food, clothes, etc.) and look at how higher price tags have affected families' abilities to purchase these essential items for their babies. We also look at how families have responded to the recent nationwide shortages in baby formula.

Previous RAPID survey findings have repeatedly shown that families with young children have been experiencing material hardship (difficulty paying for

their basic needs) since the pandemic began, and this hardship is linked to greater emotional distress among parents and their children. With costs of basic essentials going up, this pattern will likely intensify as families feel greater financial strain and struggle even more to make ends meet.

Here, we look at the impact of rising costs of baby supplies and formula on families' emotional well-being. Consistent with our data on material hardship, we see that not being able to provide basic needs for young children takes a significant toll on parents.

Overall, families are struggling with increasing costs of basic needs

- Consistently from February to June, over 98% of families in the RAPID survey observed increases in the costs of their basic needs, including housing, food, healthcare, child care, utilities, and other essentials.
- For 89% of families, these increasing costs affected their ability to buy essentials.

“I feel like my children aren't getting as much nutrients in the foods we are able to afford and its become harder to go places due to rising gas costs.”

Parent in Texas

“We're being forced to choose which necessities are the most necessary. I tried to find cheaper diapers but then my baby ended up with a rash which led to having to purchase medications to help clear it up plus buying the more expensive diapers.”

Parent in Maine

FAMILIES ARE NOTICING INCREASING COSTS OF BABY ITEMS

- In June, over 60% of RAPID families who have children under 2 years old reported that they had observed increases in costs of baby items in the previous month compared with only 20% of families in February.
- 18% of all families who have children under 2 years old reported buying fewer supplies (i.e., food, diapers, etc.) for their babies as a result of these rising costs.

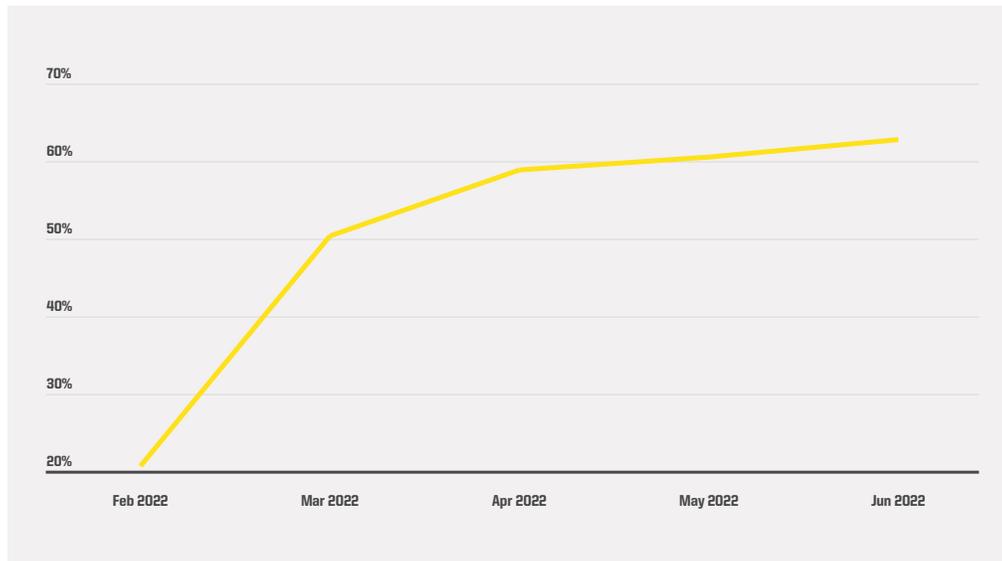
“I now no longer eat lunch. I eat 1x daily to help the family to ensure my 3 kids eat and my husband has lunch for work.”

Parent in North Carolina

- Reports of rising costs for baby items did not vary across race/ethnic groups or income levels. Even our highest income RAPID families noticed the marked spike in costs of baby supplies this spring and

summer. While they were less likely to report higher costs of baby items in February (5% of higher income families), by June they reported higher costs at the same rate as everybody else (61% of families).

Trend of the percentage of families with children under 2 years old reporting baby items becoming more expensive



IN JUNE, FAMILIES WERE STRUGGLING TO ACCESS BABY FORMULA

As costs have risen and made it harder to buy baby items, baby formula has become a particularly challenging basic need to meet.

- In June, 19% of families who buy baby formula for their babies said that they were struggling to access formula. This includes parents who could not afford its increased cost as well as those who could not find it available to

buy given the nationwide supply issues that were ongoing when this data was collected.

- The challenge of accessing formula was particularly difficult for lower income families—28% reported difficulty accessing baby formula, whereas 21% of middle income families and 11% of higher income families experienced these difficulties.

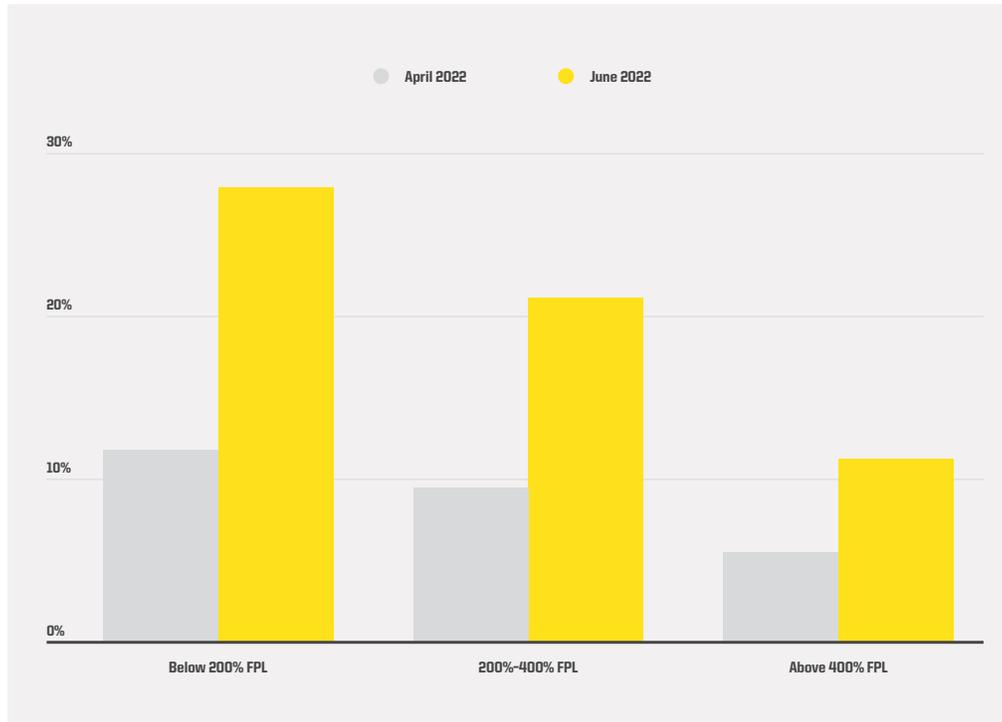
“Honestly we go hungry more often than I’d like to admit to try to stretch what food we have. With gas, we only leave the house when absolutely necessary. And as for diapers, my 2 year old gets changed twice a day and I’m really pushing her to potty train. We’ve cut out any single use unnecessary items like paper towels, kleenex, dryer sheets, ect. Instead we have hand towels that I can wash.”

Parent in Mississippi

“I am pregnant and due late June. I’m worried about formula shortages given that I don’t produce sufficient breast milk. I also worry that I won’t find child care for the baby.”

Parent in Michigan

Percentage of parents struggling with accessing baby formula form April to June 2022, by income levels



“[Our biggest concern is] formula shortage for my medically complex child who relies on it. There are children starving right now because amino acid formulas are out of stock everywhere and nothing is being done to help families dealing with this crisis.”

Parent in North Carolina

DIFFICULTY BUYING ESSENTIAL BABY ITEMS DUE TO RISING COSTS IS TAKING AN EMOTIONAL TOLL ON FAMILIES

Parents in our survey fell into three categories: those who bought fewer baby items due to increased costs, those who observed the increased costs but didn't buy less as a result, and those who didn't notice the increased costs at all.

- Parents who noticed the increased costs of baby items and were forced to cut back as a result had significantly higher emotional distress (stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness) than the other parents.

- Parents who observed higher costs but did not buy less and parents who did not notice higher costs at all showed no difference in their levels of emotional distress.

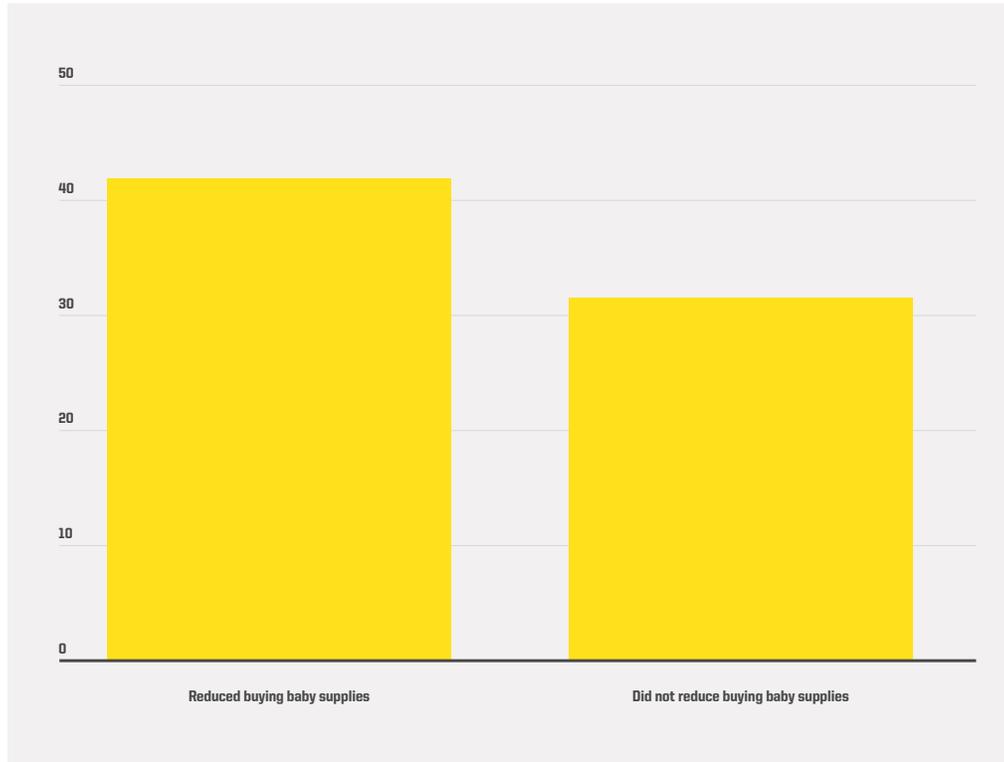
In June, difficulty accessing baby formula also took an emotional toll on families

Parents who said that they were struggling to access baby formula in June also reported higher levels of emotional distress than parents who were not dealing with this challenge.

“[Our biggest concern is] having to work extra to pay for child needs such as child care. Especially since there has been a recent increase in diapers and wipes having to work a bit extra to make sure babies necessities are met.”

Parent in California

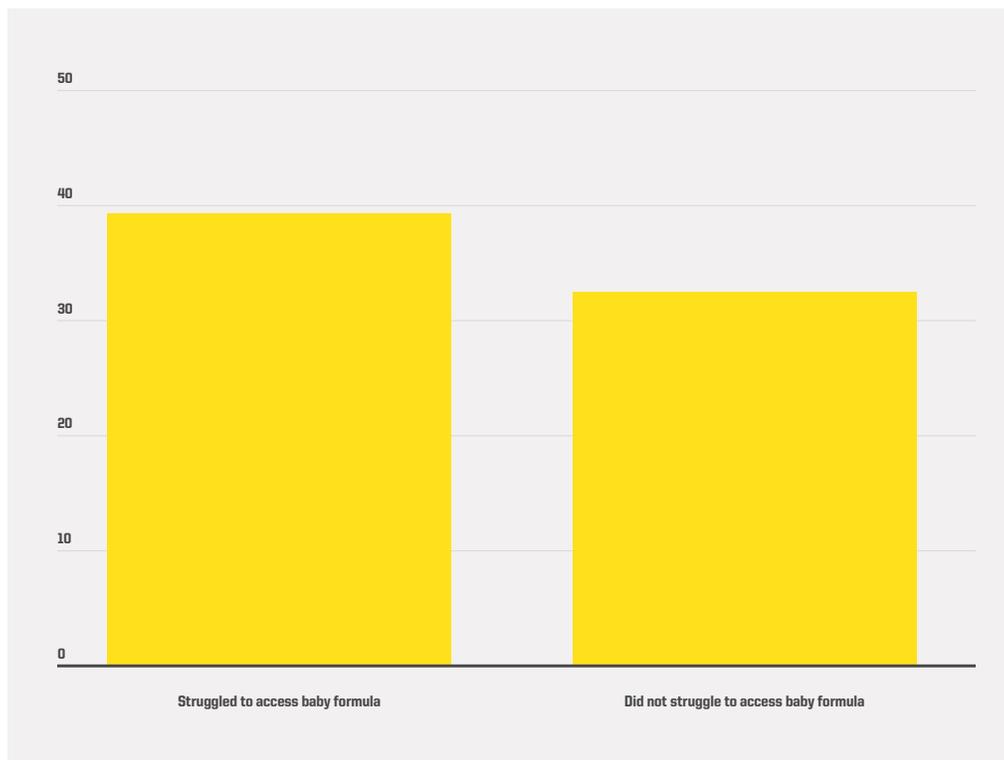
Parent emotional distress, by whether they reduced buying baby supplies*



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We ask parents about their experiences with four symptoms of emotional distress: stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Responses for each symptom were averaged to create a single score and transformed to a range of 0-100 for each parent.

Parent emotional distress, by whether they struggled to access baby formula*



“I limit buying certain items to be able to pay others. Today I just buy two gallons of milk instead of four. I try to make cornflour drink (atole) for my children since it is less expensive. I used those couple of extra dollars to put gas [in] the car to be able to go to work, take children to school or take the older child to martial arts class which is 20 minutes away from our apartment complex.”
Parent in California

SUMMARY

- During the first half of 2022, nearly all families with young children were feeling the escalating costs of basic essentials. Companies were raising prices and families were struggling to keep up.
- In June, over 60% of the families with children under 2 years old in our survey specifically noted increases in the costs of essential baby supplies. As a result, many cut back on buying these items that they need to keep their babies healthy, wellfed, and safe.
- For families with infants and toddlers who rely on baby formula, rising costs and the nationwide formula shortage presented an additional challenge. In June, many RAPID families said that they were struggling to access baby formula.
- The challenge of not being able to buy essential supplies for babies was linked to increased levels of emotional distress in parents. Difficulty accessing formula was also linked to increased levels of emotional distress.
- Our data continue to show that when families experience material hardship and are unable to meet basic needs, it takes an emotional toll on the parents trying to keep their families afloat.

“Honestly, we are on a very tight budget and our “raises” at our jobs have done nothing to incorporate the increased costs of living. We are decreasing our spending, we have planted a garden to help with food costs, we are being very cautious about our electrical uses.”

Parent in Utah

ABOUT THE RAPID PROJECT

Data presented in this fact sheet are based on RAPID household surveys. Analyses on the increased cost of baby supplies are based on responses collected from 2,659 caregivers between February and June 2022. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 6.96% are Black/African American, 10.61% are Latinx, and 26.80% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Analyses on struggles accessing baby formula are based on responses collected from 1,325 caregivers between April and June 2022 from a diverse sample of parents (8.00% are Black/African American, 13.58% are Latinx, and 26.08% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level). Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not on the total sample. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

These surveys are designed to gather essential information continuously regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families and important adults in their lives.

RAPID collects data monthly from 1,000 caregivers and child care providers in all 50 states. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative. RAPID collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID study design and methods, see [here](#).

RAPID is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center on Early Childhood at Stanford University

1,000

surveyed monthly

107

surveys

17,000+

households

50

US states

