



“Do We Gather Together? Holidays Meals During COVID”

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Introduction



- ▮ COVID-19 has had an impact on many aspects of life in this past year; one such impact is on that of the elements that go into a family meal and the concept of family gatherings for holidays. Traditionally, families come together to break bread for holidays, but during the pandemic, many extended families either did not hold gatherings or found remote methods to celebrate. Beyond the holidays, some families could not even meet to have meals together if they did not live in the same house or were unwilling to take the chance. The very meal of the family meal and the concept of coming together to celebrate over food has changed a great deal in the past year.
- ▮ These ideas are at the heart of this research, to ask not only how did the pandemic's ripple effects alter how people gathered for the holiday season but to ask how was the concept of the family meal altered this past year. The Holiday season, often seen as Thanksgiving to Christmas, is a cherished time of celebration with ones you love or hold dear which led to the question of how was it affected by the pandemic. Intertwined to that is the concept of the family meal, something that is seen differently by every person one may ask since it is a deeply personal question, and the pandemic might have altered that response in some key manners. Thus, it is the purpose of this poster and research to see how both were impacted by the past year.



Methods



- The research for this was done by analyzing the research done and articles that have come out in the past year with a focus on the holiday season of Thanksgiving to Christmas. Focus was also made toward resources that's main focal point was on family or family meals when dealing the environment of the past year. The world has changed a great deal in the past year and that promotes new research to be done on a variety of topics as COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of daily life. The literature review of the topic had to be expanded and shifted in small yet meaningful directions as the research was done as the topic is still changing and expanding as more research is published on topics related to COVID-19. In many cases, the information compiled had to be analyzed with the understanding that the links could be more tentative without proper justification.



Methods cont.

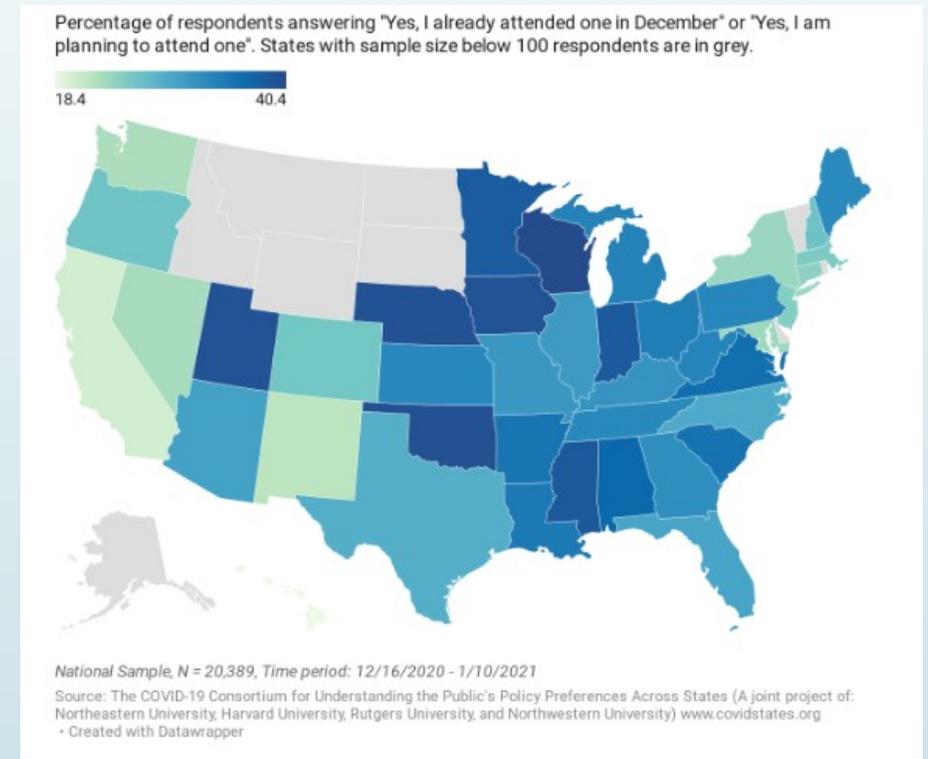
□The second part of the research was that of an open-ended short online survey that was sent out to people to fill out with the understanding of what it was for. The survey's three questions were as followed.

- 1) What does family meal mean to you?
- 2) During the past holiday season, did you spend holiday meals with the family you live with, or extended family as well?
- 3) Was there something you took for granted before Covid 19 when it comes to food and family meals? If nothing comes to mind or you have no answer just put no answer.

□The three questions all had ties to the main objectives of the research that was being done in relation to both the holidays, along with family and what people took for granted before the start of the pandemic. The answers were then compiled to get a general response to have a better understanding of what people were doing during the holiday time of Thanksgiving and Christmas and across the year.

Results & Interpretations

- The results of this research yielded some rather varied results when comes to answering the questions set forth by the starting questions of the impact the pandemic had on the holidays and the concept of the family meals. Some of note first when it comes to holidays gatherings in a study done by Lazar et al. (2021) in their report, *The COVID States Project #34: Update on holiday gatherings in December 2020*, found that upwards of 40.4% of people surveyed about if they have or will go to a holiday gathering in December said yes to that question.
- Something of important note with their study is they surveyed over two-thousand people thanks to an online survey. The full report breaks down the question of will/have they already gone to a holiday gathering by everything from race to gender to city vs rural to find their results of how likely people were to go to holiday gatherings during the pandemic. There were no further questions about how safe the gathering they were going to was or if it was mask vs unmasked so it cannot be assumed fully what these people did in each of their situations. It does however aid in creating a baseline combined with the small survey data the researcher gathered to paint the picture of people deciding to celebrate with those they trust and live with vs bringing people together over a larger distance.



Source: Lazer et al. (2021) COVID States Project #34 pp. 6
The full report broke it down by demographics, but the larger picture does give a good wide scope of the situation of what people said.

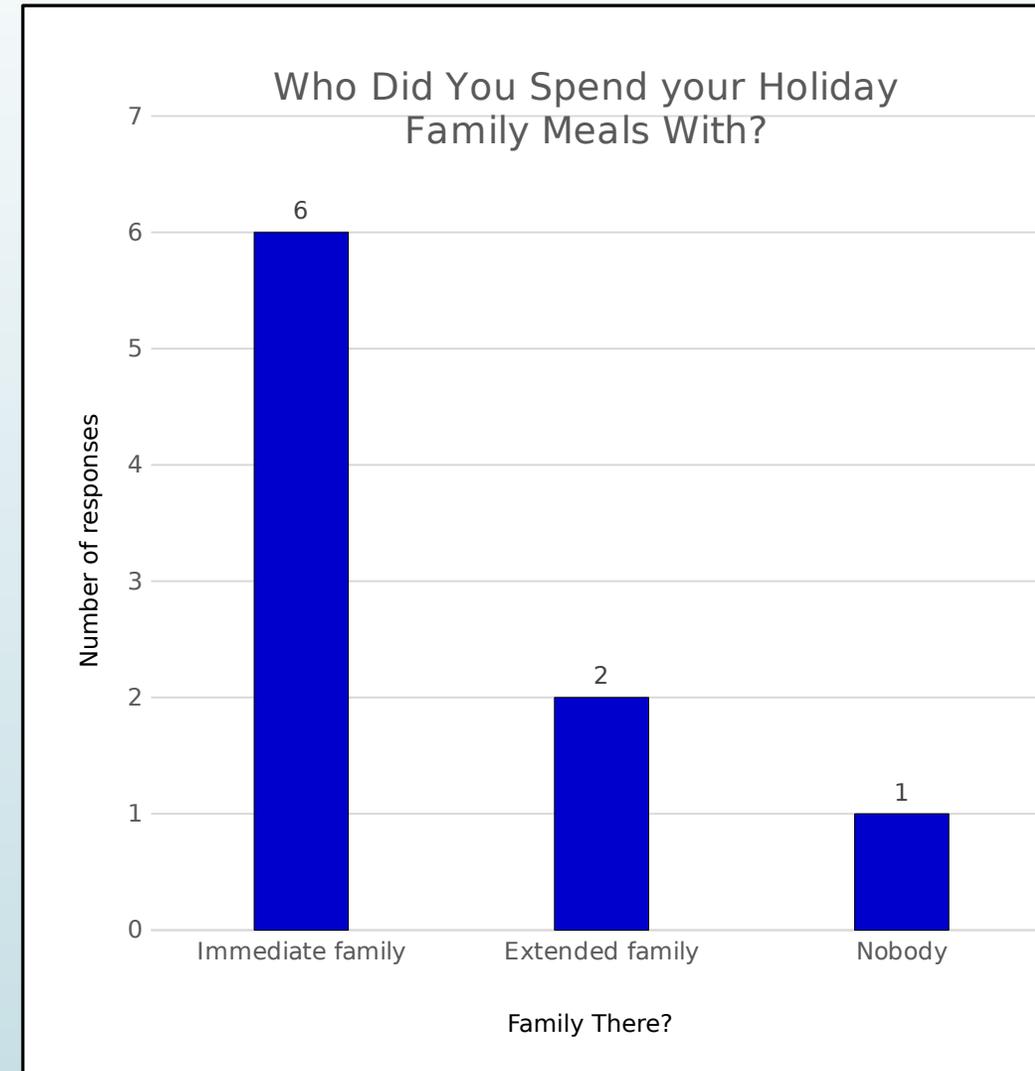


Results & Interpretations cont.

- Something of particularly interesting note when it comes to how some groups dealt with family meals and helping their community was a practical note by Utter and McCray (2020) about the Australian hospital she worked at implementing a family meal program to support the healthcare workers of the hospital. This program would not only provide lunch on the job as per usual practices the foodservice provider had with the hospital. They would also work with the dietetics staff to create good nutritional quality family meals for the workers to take home to their families.
- As an additional to note with the research found is the impact to the families themselves. Both studies by Evans et al. (2020) and Snugs & McGregor (2020) looked at the families impacted amidst the pandemic to see what had changed for them. Even et al. (2020) found a several different themes emerged when interviewing families of children 0-18 years of age ranging from boredom to unequal burdens to attempts of holding onto the positivity they had with their families due to the lockdown. As a positive impact from the lockdown, and something that Snugs & McGregor (2020) found more directly, was the increased desire to involve families at mealtime. They found that families started putting more importance in involving the family during mealtime and less so on ease of preparation as the pandemic continued as they were always at home with their children. Thus, making it easier to make more complicated meals as everyone was there to aid in the creation of making the meal.

Results & Interpretations cont.

- Lastly for the personal online survey that was done, all participants answered similarly on what family meal meant to them as a time for family to get together, talk about what they want and share a meal. However, the third question led to varied responses from those who chose to answer it. Responses ranged from a fear to serve food they make to people due to the pandemic, to taking for granted catching up on family news to simply missing the chance to spend time with friends and extended family. The second question aided in painting the picture of people generally not having large family gathering due to the pandemic and the risks associated with that. Even those who did took precautions to ensure family members were safe to be beforehand.





Conclusions



- Holidays and family meals are two concepts that go hand in hand as the two are intertwined with the meaning being different for each person. Holiday gathering and meals were impacted heavily by the pandemic's influence on guidelines set forth by governmental bodies and by general fear of it caused. However, some people did gather together despite that risk and some took precautions while doing so. The research gathered does paint the picture of people taking care in ensuring they do not aid in spreading the pandemic among extended family and instead had much tighter knit celebrations instead. In regards for the concept of the family meal, it was mostly unchanged. The pieces that go into it such as where the food comes from or who made it might have changed, but the idea of sharing with the ones closest to you has not changed. In many regards it has becomes even more important to some families as they have considered it to be a bigger part of their family mealtime to bring in the entire family to create the meal.
- To paint the whole picture of the past year with a focus on the holiday season, people came together with those they cherished or trusted most to celebrate together as a small tight knit family.



References



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Acknowledgments

- Thank you to those who filled out the survey, EIU for putting this online conference on and Dr. Glaros for the opportunity to participate in this.