



Transforming Policy through Research: Challenges and Opportunities

**Jeffrey Shook, PhD, JD, MSW
Associate Professor of Social Work, Law and Sociology**

Pittsburgh Wage Study | University of Pittsburgh

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Engaging Policy through Research

- **Broad based perspective on policy**
- **Policies and systems serving children, youth and families**
- **Tension over objectivity**
- **Production of research is not sufficient**
- **Action is necessary when guided by the research**
- **Policies and systems designed to support children, youth and families are too often bandaids**

Engaging in Policies on Low Wage Work

- Invited by the Pittsburgh City Council to testify at several hearings
- Consulted on sick days and other policies
- Asked by City Council to serve on the Wage Review Committee
 - Heard testimony from 100s of workers, experts and others
- Wage Review Committee issued several reports and disseminated findings
- Some action from large employers
- Policymakers continued to ask questions

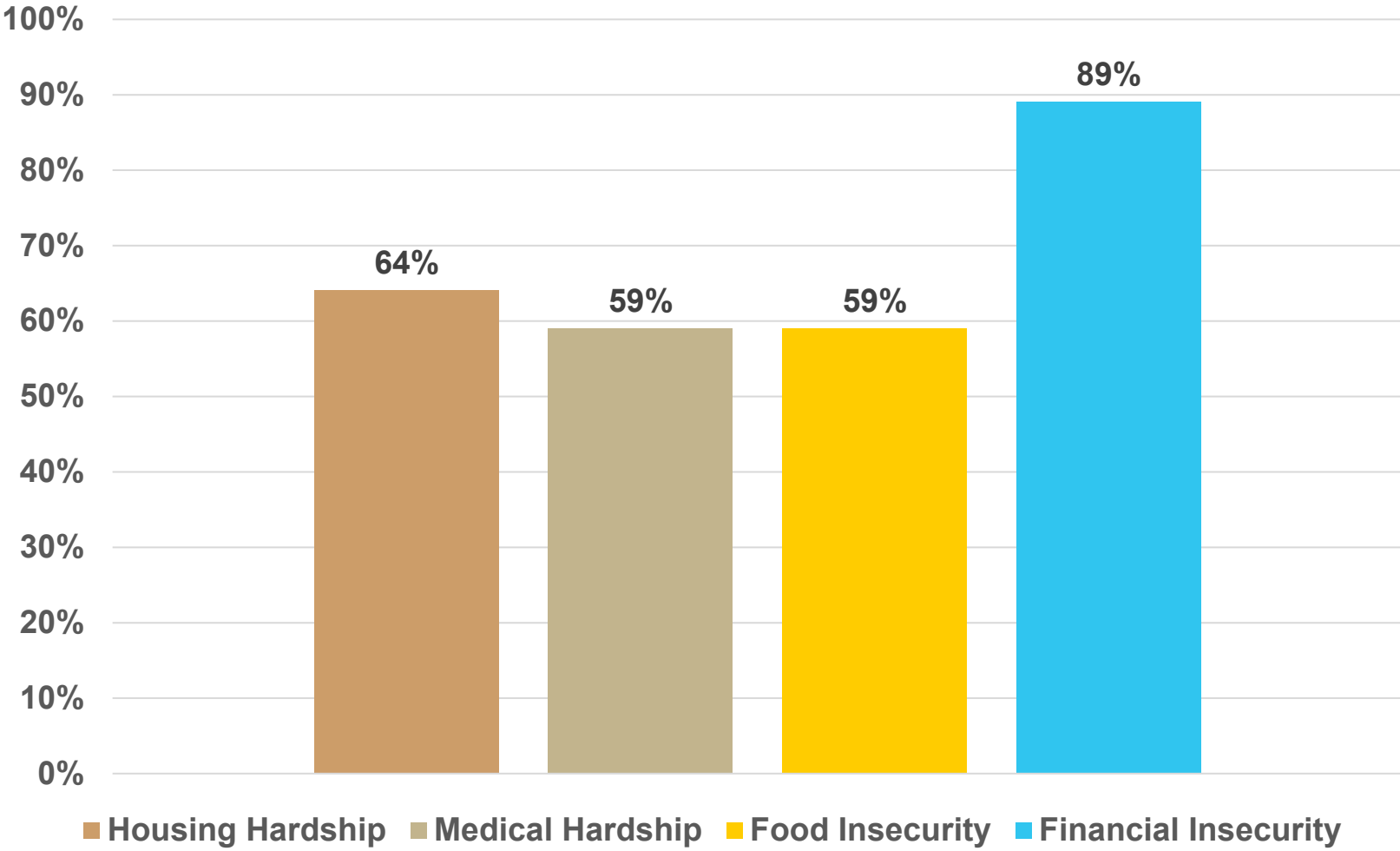
Pittsburgh Wage Study

- Do wage increases improve the well-being of hospital workers?
- Worker centered focus
- Multi-year mixed methods study of the experiences and challenges of hospital workers
- Three waves of surveys and in-depth interviews
- Additional survey in 2021 focused on Covid
- Supplemental projects

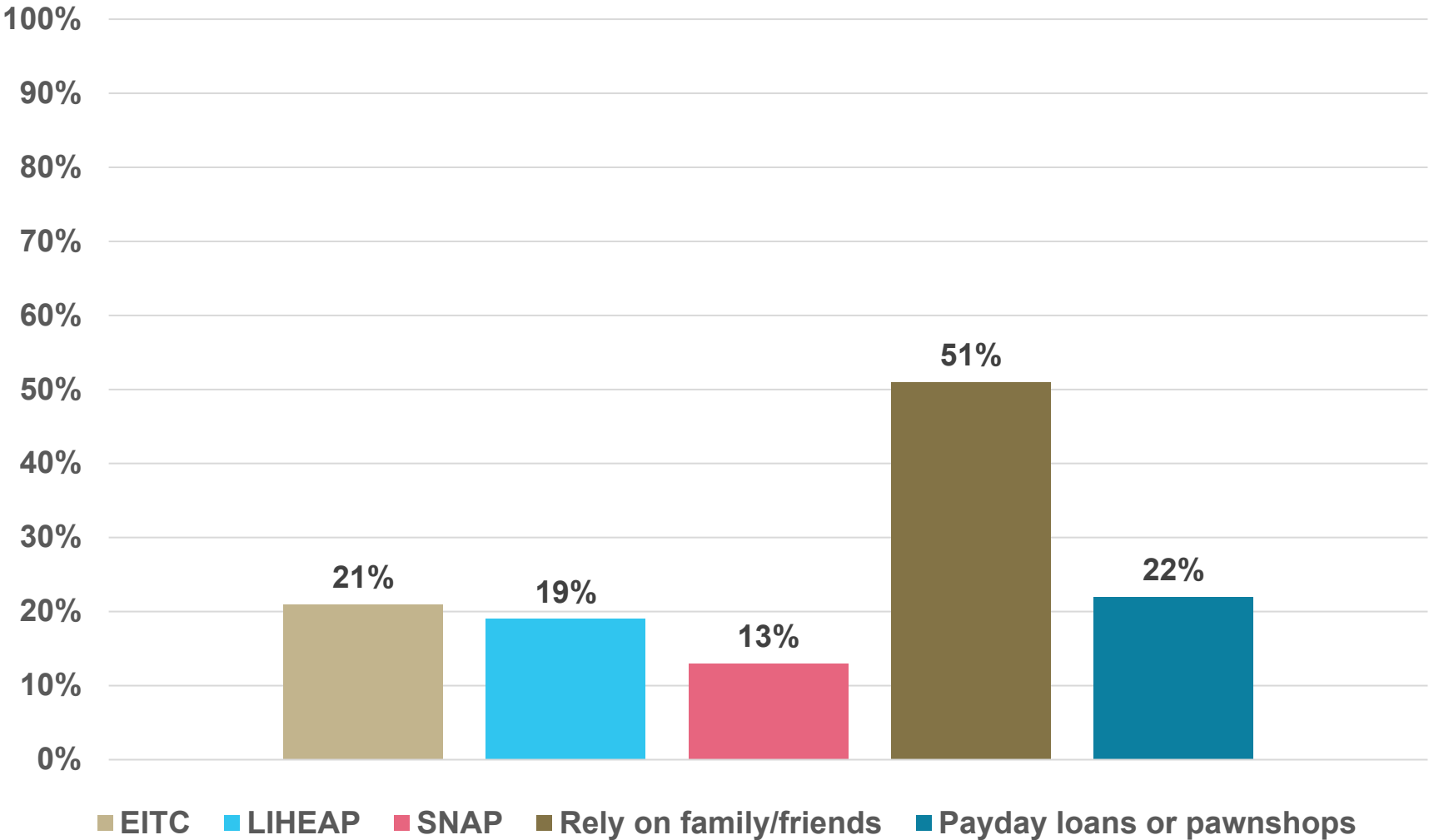
Take Away Points from Pittsburgh Wage Study

- Significant hardships → workers need to adopt a range of strategies
- Many do not use or are not eligible for public benefits
- Evidence that wage increases reduced hardships
- \$15/hour still not enough
- Above \$20/hour experience less material hardship and financial insecurity
- Material hardships, financial insecurity, and strategies are associated with higher levels of stress
- Stress is associated with health and mental health
- Significant mental health concerns among essential workers

Hardships

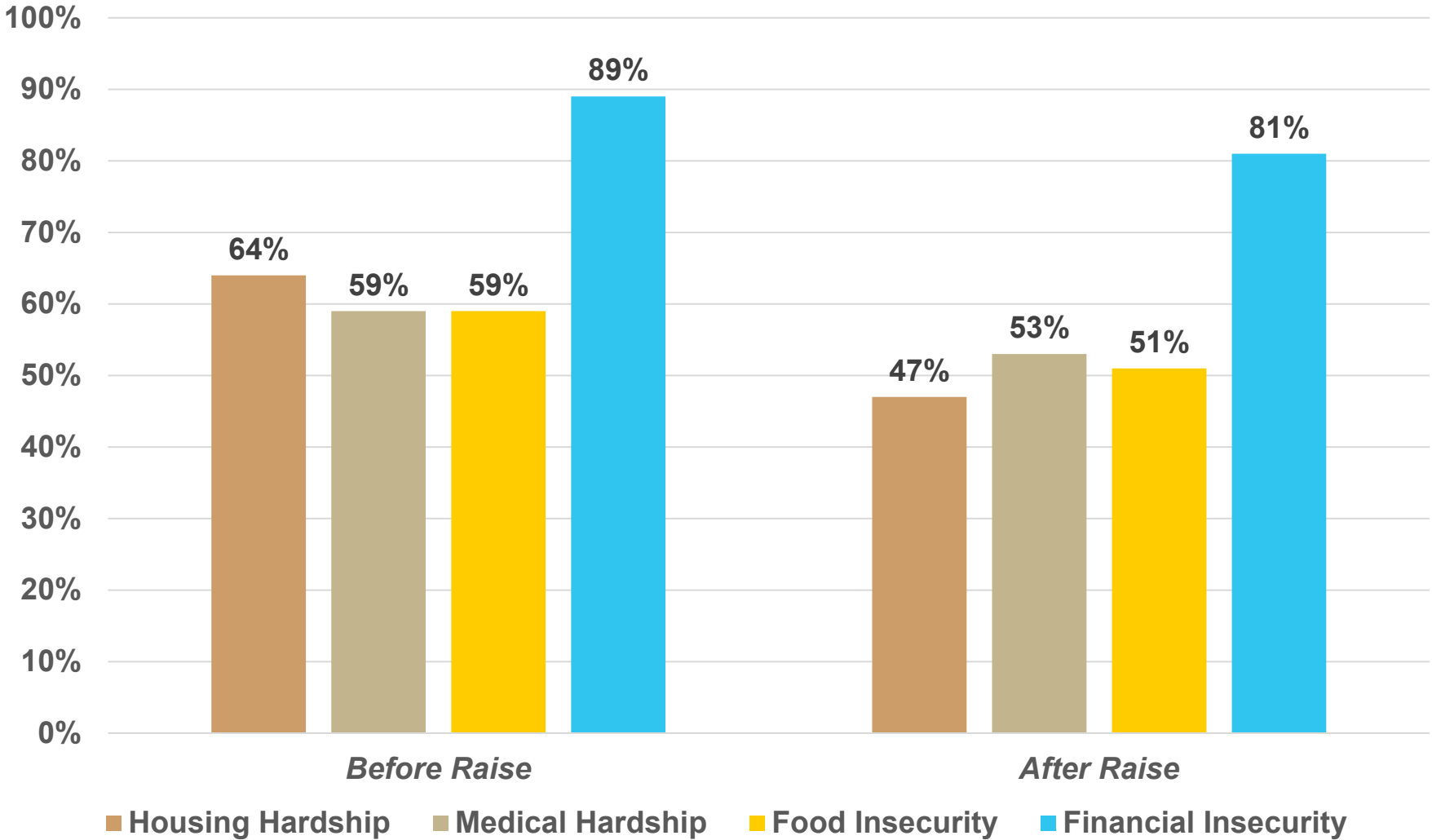


Public Benefit/Private Strategies Use



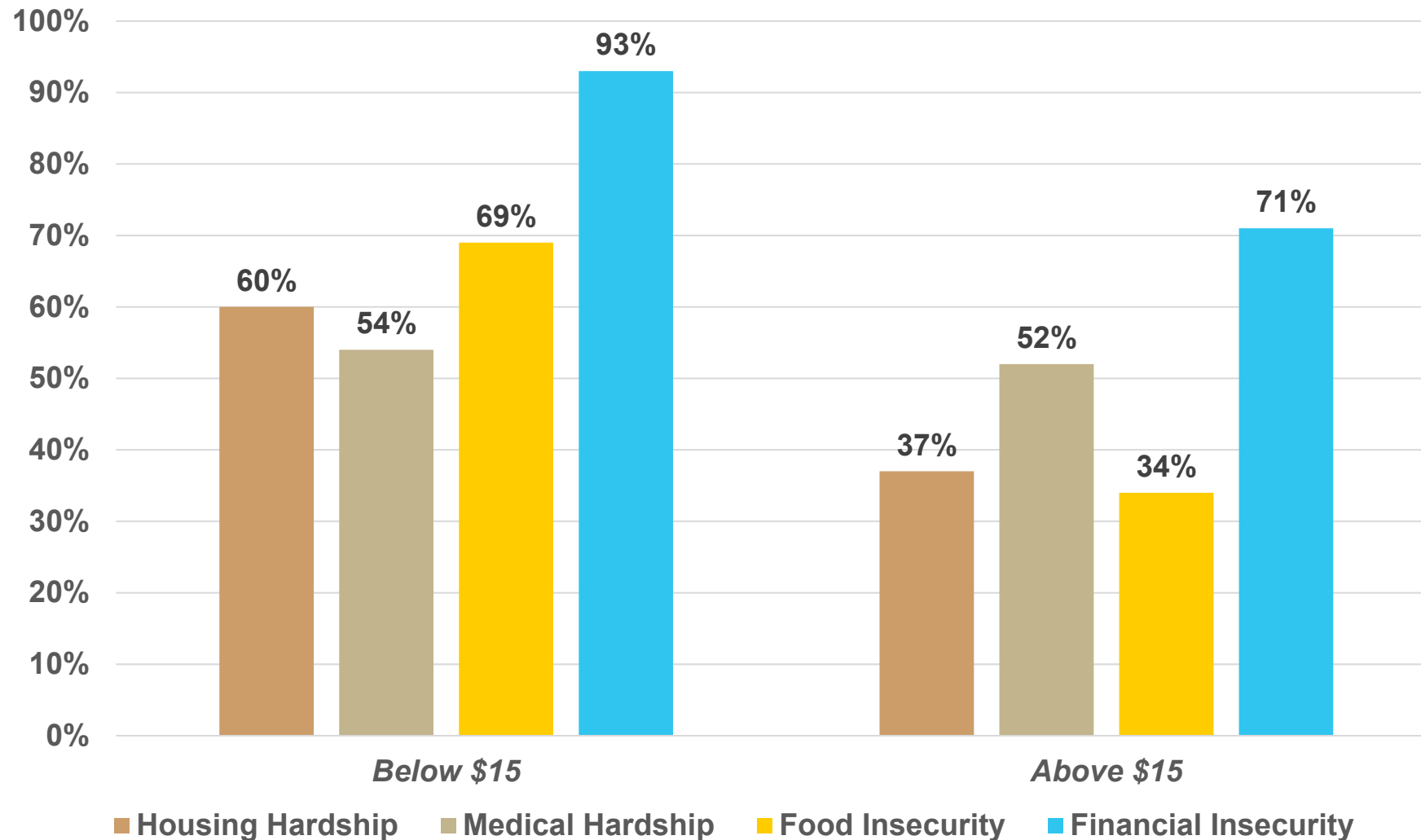
<https://www.pittsburghwagestudy.pitt.edu/>

Do Wage Increases Help?



<https://www.pittsburghwagestudy.pitt.edu/>

Above/Below \$15



Wage Quartiles

A survey of hospital service workers in Western Pennsylvania (N=330)

1

Four groups based on hourly wage quantiles

2

Bivariate analyses to see differences between the groups

3

Group 1
Less than
\$12.56

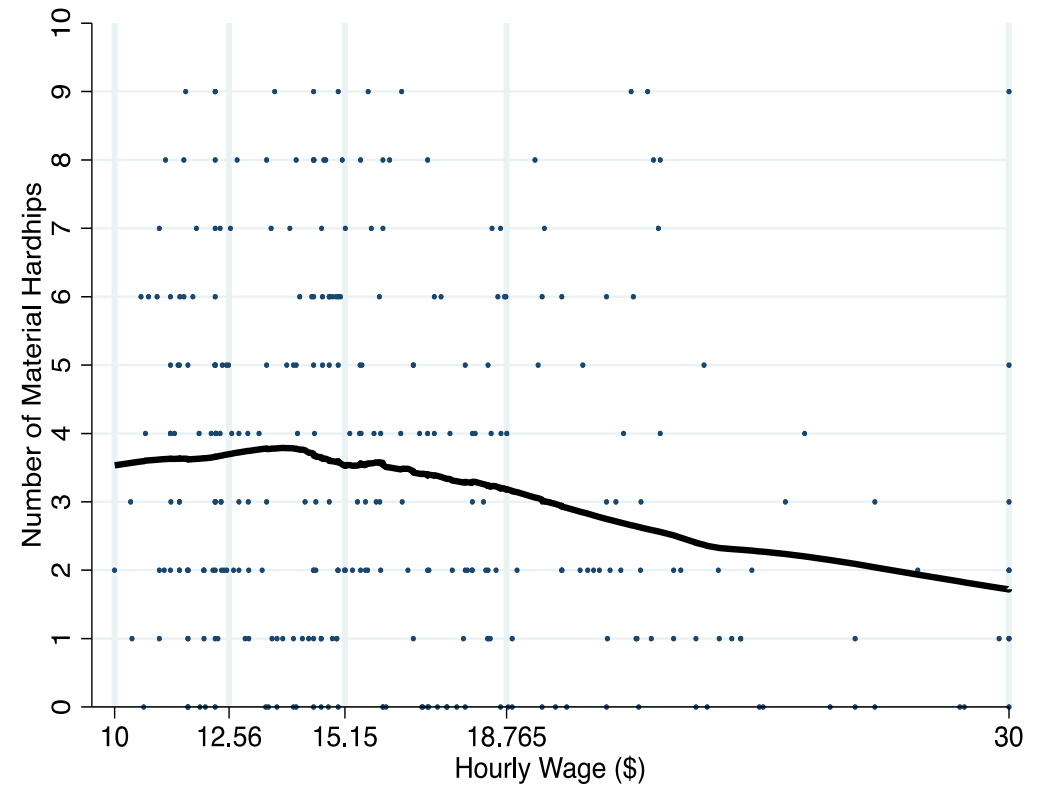
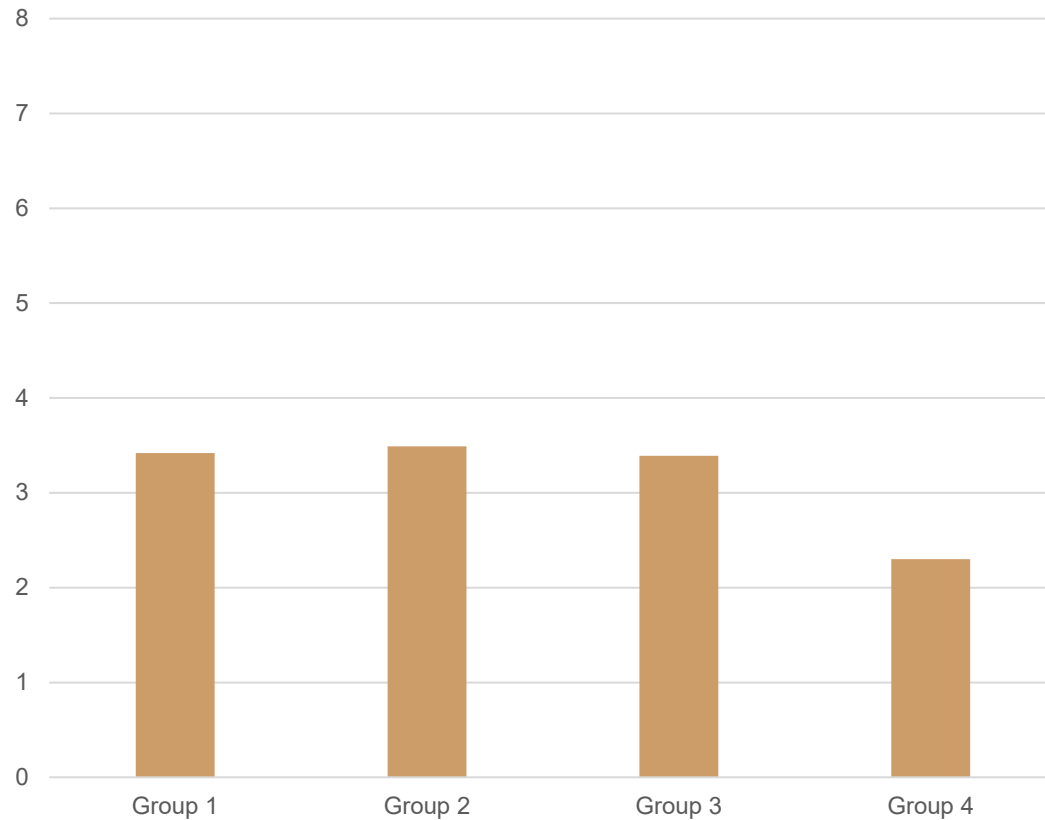
Group 2
\$12.57-
\$15.15

Group 3
\$15.16-
\$18.765

Group 4
\$18.77
and above

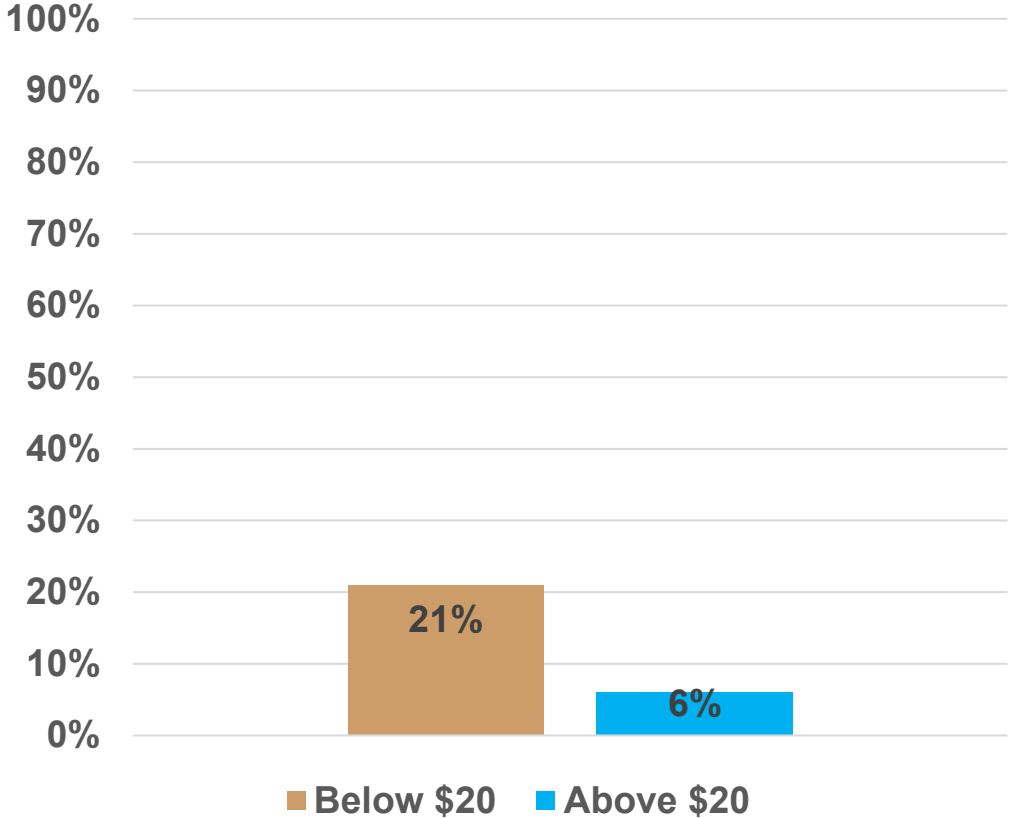
Is \$15 Enough?

Mean Hardships

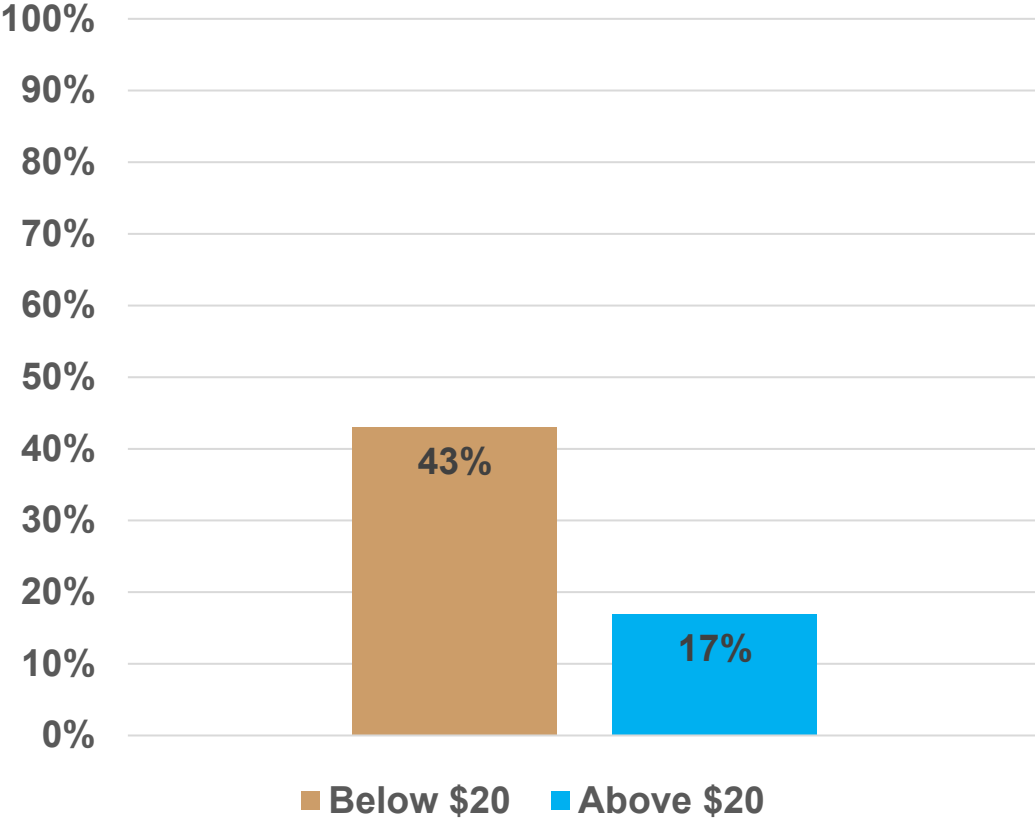


Above/Below \$20

Housing Hardship

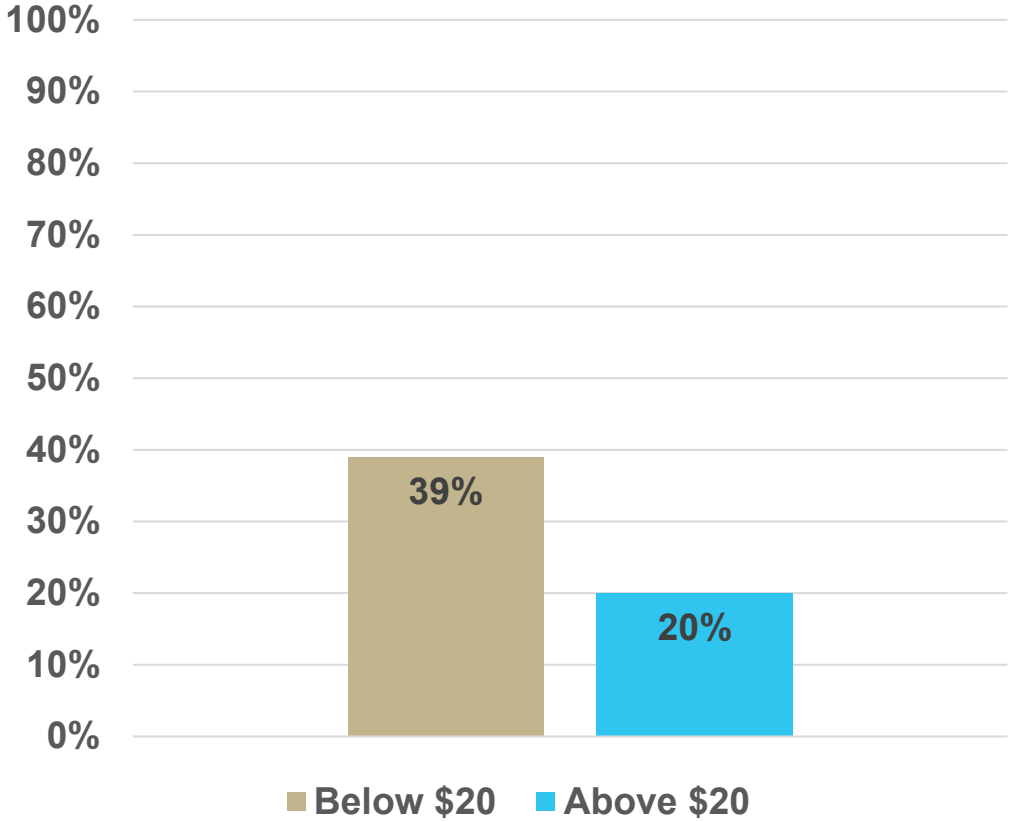


Food Insecurity

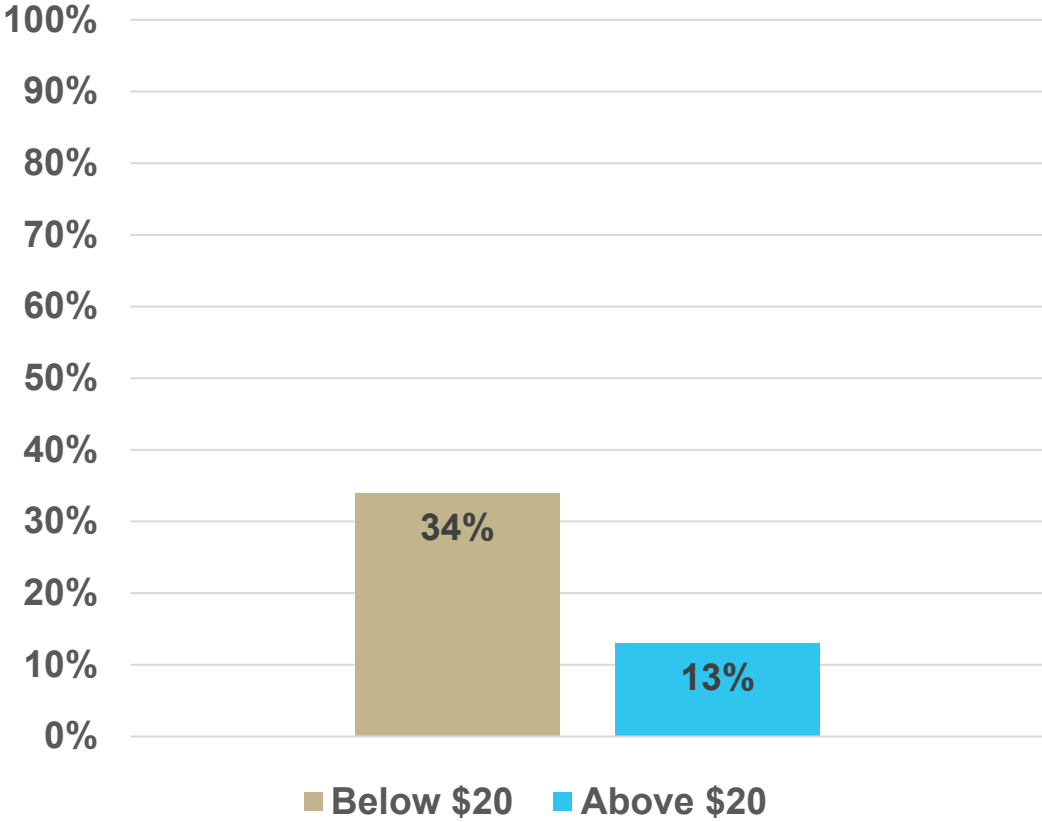


Above/Below \$20

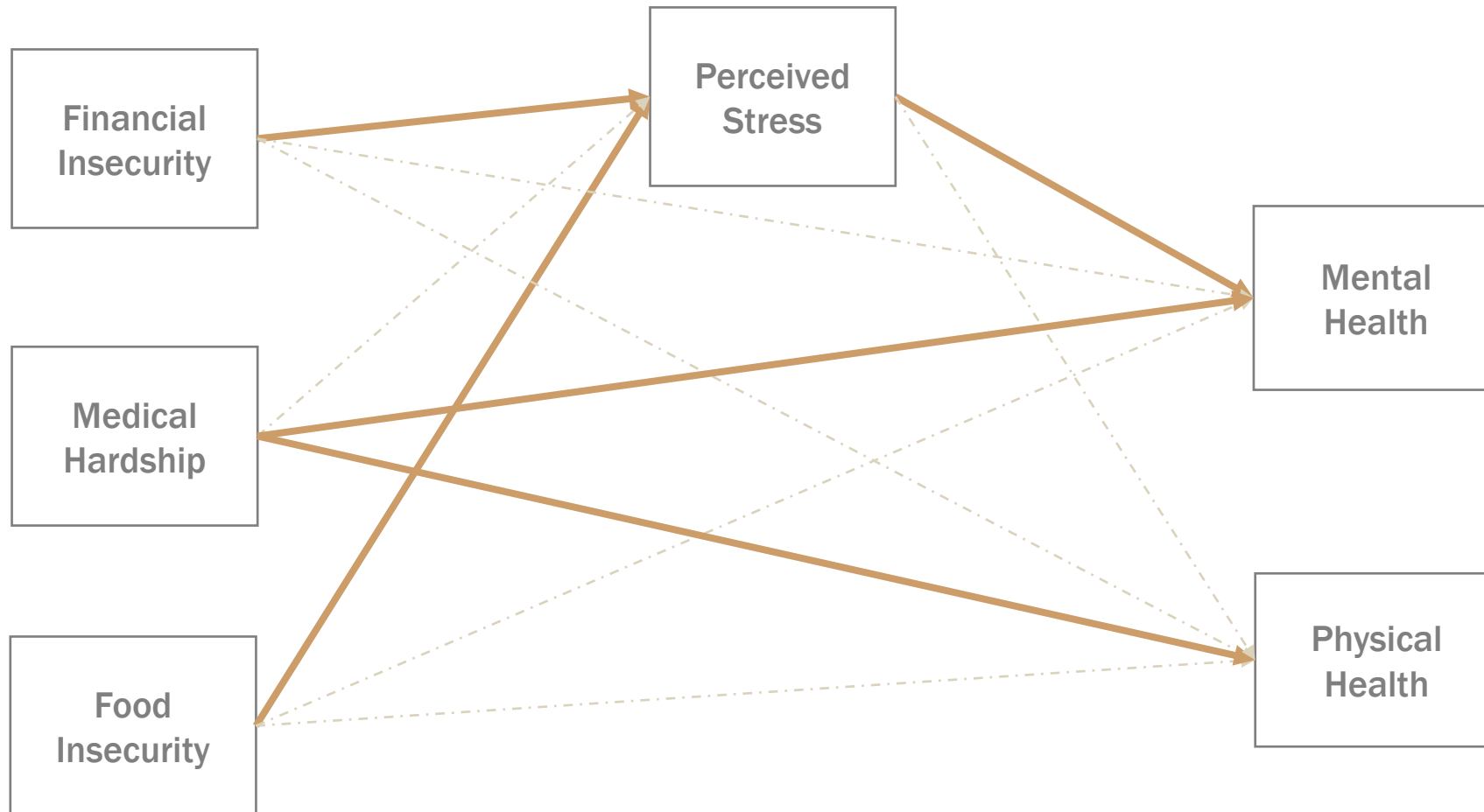
Utility Hardship



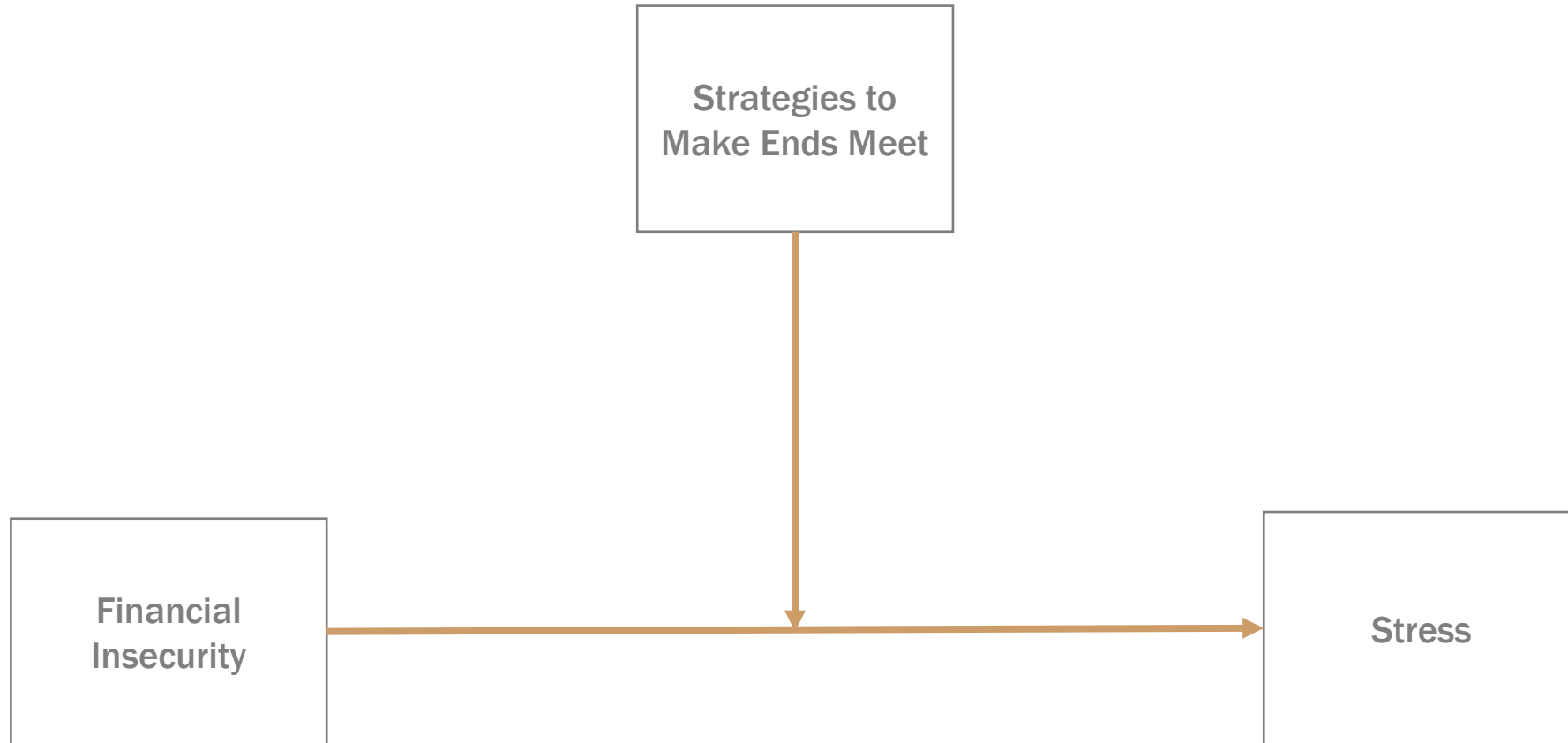
Essential Expense Hardship



Material Hardships, Stress, and Health



Strategies Increase Stress



What Does This Mean?

- **Hardworking/essential workers**
- **High levels of mental health symptoms**
- **Evidence indicates that paying workers more will:**
 - **Reduce hardships**
 - **Reduce reliance on strategies to make ends meet**
 - **Reduce stress**
 - **Improve health and mental health**
- **Evidence also points to the importance of treating these hospital workers with dignity and respect**

Moving Forward: Role of Researchers

- Research briefs and reports
- Op-eds and other forms of media
- Participation in bargaining sessions
- Testimony at public hearings
- Direct engagement with policymakers and staff
- Continuing to develop relationships with other organizations
- Bringing the conversation to business groups and employers
- Showing up when asked



JEFFREY SHOOK – JES98@PITT.EDU

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