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Reopening During COVID-19: The Experience of Nail Salon Workers and Owners in California

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# Reopening During COVID-19

The Experience of Nail  
Salon Workers and  
Owners in California

November 2021

**UCLA** Labor Center



CALIFORNIA  
HEALTHY NAIL SALON  
COLLABORATIVE

Liên Hiệp Ngành Móng Tay Lành Mạnh



## About

### **California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative**

The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative's mission is to improve the health and safety and rights of the nail and beauty care workforce to achieve a healthier, more sustainable, and just industry. Through outreach and education, nail salon workers and owners build their knowledge and skills on health, safety, and workplace rights. We also provide leadership development and believe in organizing to transform communities, organizations and individuals. For more information, see [www.cahealthynailsalons.org](http://www.cahealthynailsalons.org)

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The UCLA Labor Center believes that a public university belongs to the people and should advance quality education and employment for all. We bring together workers, students, faculty, and policymakers to address critical issues facing working people today. Our research, education, and policy work lifts industry standards, creates jobs that are good for communities, and strengthens immigrant rights, especially for students and youth. For more information, visit [labor.ucla.edu](http://labor.ucla.edu)

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# Executive Summary

California is a major hub for the nail salon industry, with more than 100,000 licensed manicurists throughout the state. Most of the nail salons are small mom-and-pop businesses, and are primarily staffed by women and Vietnamese immigrants and refugees. Nail salons, in particular, were upended by COVID-19 and the shelter-in-place order of March 2020 that forced their closures for most of that year. Nail salons were allowed to reopen and then were forced to close again as cases surged, and finally reopened again in early 2021. This cycle of openings and closings took a tremendous emotional and financial strain on owners and workers alike. Although the industry is expected to bounce back, a new plethora of factors may affect the future of the industry.

Drawing on a survey of 158 nail salon workers and 42 owners and interviews with 4 workers and 2 owners, this report provides insight into the economic and emotional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on nail salons in California. The results shed light on the financial fragility of workers and owners alike, and the significant—yet distinct—impact on their livelihoods. The following are key findings:

## 1. Navigating Economic Uncertainty During COVID-19 Closures

- Salon closures impacted both workers and owners, and the majority (90%) were unable to find other work during this period.
- During closures, 91% of workers applied for the state's unemployment insurance (UI) and 32% applied for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA).
- Owners also applied for aid, including the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) (67%) and other small business loans (29%). Of owners who applied, most noted that the checks they received were not nearly enough to cover their business expenses.

## 2. Returning to the Nail Salons: The Experience of Workers and Owners with Reopening

- As salons reopened, 93% of workers returned to the same salons they had worked at before the March, 2020 closures. Workers (89%) and owners (84%) both reported that their salon had downsized by one or more people.
- The reasons owners said they were unable to rehire workers included: the salon did not have enough customers (74%), they could not afford to employ all of their prior staff

(42%), workers didn't want to come back (37%), and they had to reduce their staff in order to maintain physical distancing guidelines (24%).

- Workers noticed a reduction in business with 75% reporting that their salon had been especially slow during the week before. Most (88%) owners reported not having enough customers to meet their business expenses.
- Only 14% of owners were confident that they would be able to cover business expenses such as rent and payroll over the next month. This was the case even with an increase in the cost of services. Workers (44%) and owners (78%) indicated that services at their nail salon had increased in prices since reopening—between \$1 to \$10 per service.
- Though most owners (90%) reported not making any pay cuts to workers after reopening, the majority (83%) of workers reported a reduction in their earnings. In fact, 86% of workers were earning less than \$400 per week. The percentage of workers working 20 or less hours had doubled, with 75% of workers compared to 37% before the pandemic.
- Over half (57%) of workers struggled to pay for their household expenses and necessities and 48% indicated they needed to get food from a food bank after COVID-19 started. Among owners, 60% reported being uncertain about their ability to pay for food and other necessities for the next month.
- The past year saw an unprecedented level of violence and discrimination against Asian Americans with 14% of workers experiencing discrimination in their workplace. Among owners, 19% had personally experienced anti-Asian discrimination, and 14% had witnessed their workers being harassed or discriminated against. Anecdotal data suggests these rates are much higher than what was self reported.

### **3. Keeping Workplaces Safe: Implementing COVID-19 Safety Measures in Nail Salons**

- Owners required mask-wearing (91%) and personal protective equipment (PPE) (83%), installed plexiglass between workstations (67%), reduced the number of workstations (55%), and improved their ventilation (50%). Still, 55% of owners said that funding was a challenge to make the necessary modifications.
- For PPE, there were some differences in what workers said they received and what owners said they provided. For masks, 76% of workers and 93% of owners reported that employers provided masks, 76% of workers and 85% of owners said that employers provided face



shields, and 76% of workers and 90% of owners reported that employers provided gloves.

- As for mask-wearing, only 7% of owners noted that some customers do not always come into nail salons wearing masks, but 21% of owners and 15% of workers reported having a confrontation around wearing masks inside the salon.
- The majority (97%) of workers expressed that their employer offered reasonable protections and were very responsive to offering COVID-19 protections.
- Most (62%) workers reported that their employer does not offer paid sick leave or paid family leave, while 76% of owners reported not offering these protections.
- Some workers (20%) felt that they were at risk of being exposed to COVID-19 while working at the nail salons. Meanwhile, 62% of workers said health and safety was their principal concern since reopening. For 59% of owners, having enough business and customers was their main concern.
- Half (49%) of workers reported feeling moderately to extremely stressed compared to 85% of owners. Similarly, 52% of workers and 84% of the owners felt moderately to extremely anxious since reopenings.

#### **4. Supporting Workers and Owners**

- Workers (69%) and owners (72%) would like more information on COVID-19's impact on the salon industry. In addition, workers (53%) and owners (74%) would like to know how to best protect themselves and clients at work.
- Workers (38%) want information on workplace modifications, labor laws, and regulations and owners (72%) want more information about small business loans and grant applications.
- Workers (31%) and owners (49%) indicated that they would like more information on strategies to address anti-Asian racism and de-escalating racial tension.
- A large portion of workers (43%) and owners (63%) reported needing help accessing emergency funds to help cover bills, food, etc. More than half of workers (43%) and owners (55%) indicated that they need PPE to protect themselves at work.
- A quarter of workers (23%) and owners (34%) indicated that they would like assistance for benefits, such as paid sick leave and paid family leave.

- Of the 55% of the workers that had children, 56% needed additional support with their child's online learning, 28% needed support with childcare, and 9% needed interpretation to communicate with the child's school.
- Both workers (89%) and owners (83%) reported that staff came together in their salon to talk about workplace concerns and ideas for health and safety. Most indicated that the meetings were helpful to discuss important information and foster worker organizing.

COVID-19 continues to devastate the nail salon industry as they navigate the second year of the pandemic. Reopening and recovery requires a commitment to providing resources and support to build a more equitable industry. The following are key recommendations:



1. **Provide accessible COVID-19 updates, guidelines, and support for the nail salon community** that includes in-language technical assistance and outreach, resourcing community organizations to provide education and training, personal protective equipment at a wholesale or low cost for employers to provide to their staff, and accessible regular COVID-19 testing.



2. **Provide support to nail salon workers and employers who continue to be further impacted by COVID-19** through in-language, culturally competent mental health services, anti-eviction rent moratoriums, and commercial rent relief. In addition, create a public health and gender-based approach to counter anti-Asian xenophobia, stereotyping, discrimination, and violence in public spaces, including small businesses or industries that are Asian dominated and in Asian ethnic enclaves.



3. **Ensure a just recovery from COVID-19 by having strong worker protections in place**, including securing exclusion pay (pay during quarantine), protection from retaliation, and health and safety and labor law protections. In addition, support the Public Health Councils that would conduct peer-to-peer education and incentivize employers who are following COVID-19 protections. Further, Cal/OSHA protections should be extended to all workers regardless of worker classification and the agency should increase its resources and staffing.



4. **Conduct ongoing research on the nail salon industry** in order to have current data during the varying phases and impact of the pandemic as the industry emerges and evolves. In addition, research industry-wide innovative approaches and improvements that benefit all stakeholders.





## Introduction

### Industry Snapshot

Before the onset of the pandemic, the nail salon sector was a thriving, multi-billion-dollar industry that was expected to increase by 13% in the next decade.<sup>1</sup> Labor force participation for the nail salon sector was higher than that of the national rate. In 2016, the national rate stood at 64%, with labor force participation in the nail salon sector at 92% and a low unemployment rate of 3%.<sup>2</sup>

Previous studies have noted that government estimates likely undercount the number of employees in the sector. For this report we use the government dataset as a way to understand overall employment trends such as percent change in employment numbers.<sup>3</sup> In the five years prior to the pandemic, the industry experienced continued growth in employment. Since 2015, the industry saw an increase in employment by 45%.

Table 1: Annual Number of Nail Salon Employees in California, 2015-2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Average employment	18,537	20,646	22,494	24,526	27,043
Percent increase	-	11%	9%	9%	10%

Source: *Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages*

Almost half of nail salon workers in the U.S. were located in four major states: California, Texas, Florida, and New York.<sup>4</sup> The industry is central to the life of the Vietnamese community in these states, and is a stable source of employment for refugees and immigrants who have limited English proficiency. For monolingual immigrants and refugees, going into the nail salon industry can be attractive: cosmetology school is relatively affordable and efficient, and training and licensing exams are often offered in Vietnamese. Language access is vital for workers not only to develop their skills but also in understanding health and safety material, know-your-rights information, and COVID-19 protections.

The industry faces complex challenges for workers, including a variety of labor and health issues. The majority (78%) of the workforce earns low wages, which is over twice the rate of workers in other industries.<sup>5</sup> Small sample studies and investigative reporting have found that significant issues in the industry include low wages, payment being a flat rate rather than an hourly one, minimum wage, overtime violations, and workplace harassment and surveillance.<sup>6</sup>

Misclassification is also a fundamental concern here, as the sector has a high rate of self-employed workers, which includes independent contractors. While some may identify as independent contractors, many manicurists are purposely misclassified to avoid labor protections. Nail salon workers in particular are at risk for a variety of occupational health conditions, both short and long-term. They are exposed to hazardous ingredients and are also likely to experience work-related ergonomic body pain.<sup>7</sup>



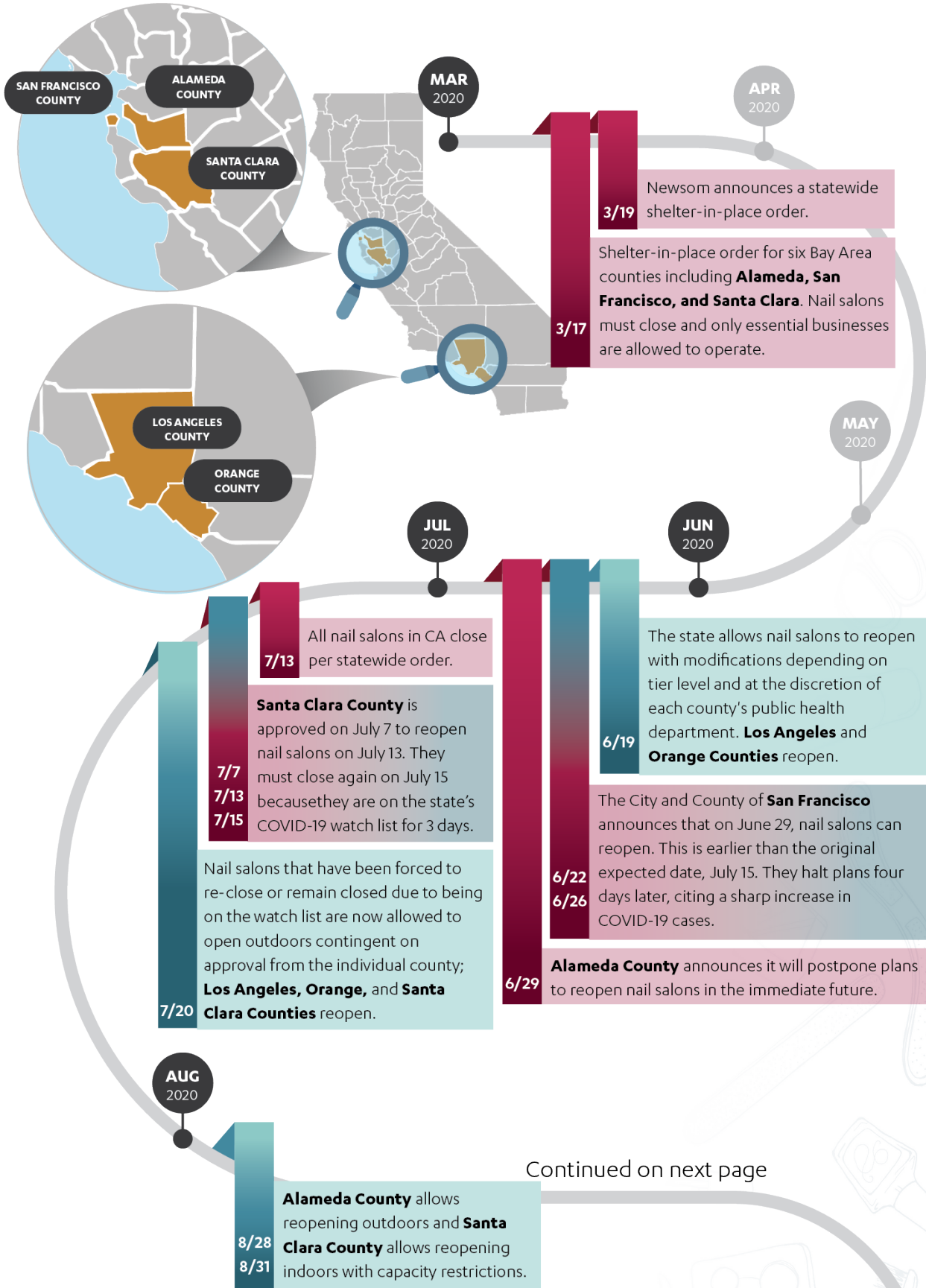
## COVID-19 and Nail Salon Closures

As an industry that is necessarily physically intimate with its public, it faces a much higher risk of COVID-19 exposure for both workers and customers. Nail salons have faced shutdowns for extended periods from statewide orders as well as county mandates. California officials implemented shelter-in-place orders that went into effect in mid-March of 2020 for all major counties. These forced the nail salon industry to shut down immediately. Nail salons in jurisdictions such as San Francisco, Alameda County, and Santa Clara County were set to open in late June, but those plans were put on hold due to sharp increases in COVID-19 cases within a short time span. In Los Angeles County and Orange County, nail salons opened for a brief period in June but were forced to once again shut down.

In August and September 2020, some counties allowed nail salons with the capacity to operate only outdoors depending on their county. If they were in the purple tier, the nail salons could operate outdoors, but for counties in the red, orange, or yellow tiers they could work indoors. Many of those in the purple tier chose not to. As the heat hit over 100 degrees in some regions, heat illness was of mortal concern. Additional issues of serious significance included the overhead costs in establishing safe outdoor services, COVID-19 exposure, and outdoor dust or debris that would interfere with services. Furthermore, only limited nail services were easily conducted in outdoor settings.<sup>8</sup>

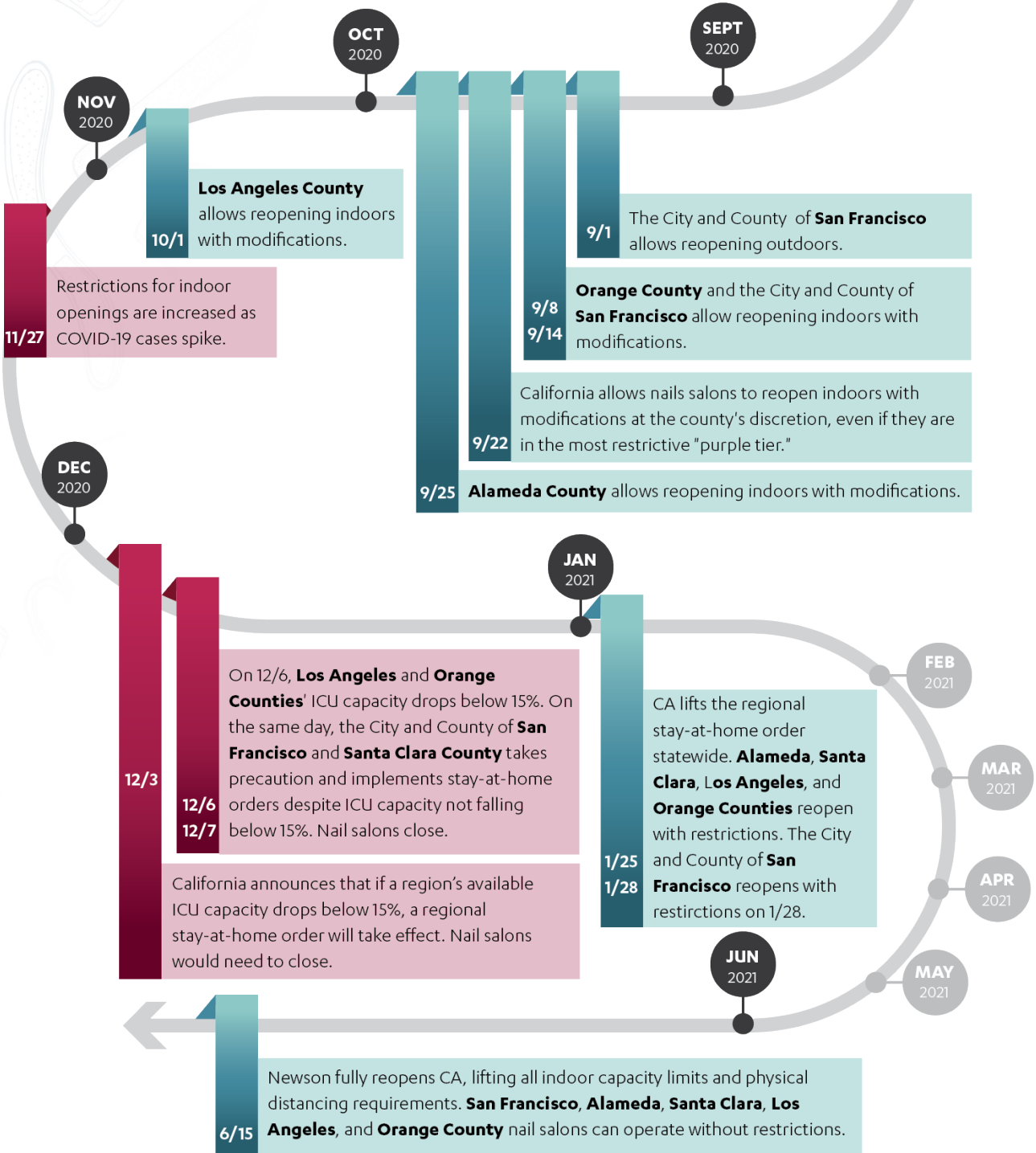
Nail salons in major counties came to an abrupt close in early December when the amount of new cases went up by 112% and ICU capacity fell as low as 15% in some Southern California regions.<sup>9</sup> On January 25, 2021, the regional stay-at-home orders were lifted throughout the state and nail salons were allowed to reopen at limited capacity, and the state fully reopened on June 15, 2021. Overall, this cycle of openings and closings took a tremendous emotional and financial strain.<sup>10</sup> The long term impact on those who survived this cycle remains to be seen.

Figure 2: Calendar of COVID-19 Reopenings and Closures for CA and Select Counties



Continued on next page





Source: California Health Nail Salon Collaborative Tracking

Reopening meant nail salons had to follow COVID-19 guidelines, implement modifications, develop safety protocols, and limit capacity.<sup>11</sup> Guidelines required staff to wear a face covering at all times. In some instances, a face shield was also required. Other safety measures were suggested, though not mandated, such as limiting multiple services, barring walk-ins, reducing the amount of people allowed in the salon, closing waiting areas, and ensuring that only staff and customers were the only ones present. Clients were encouraged to wait in their vehicles until their appointment was up.

The severity of the collapse of the industry is visible in the table below; the workforce fell by 80% in the second quarter, and annually saw a reduction by one-third compared to the previous year’s employment. Although employee count may be undercounted, the change in employment data provides a sense of the degree of catastrophe visited on the sector.

**Table 2: Number of Nail Salon Employees in California, Quarterly and Annual Totals 2020-2021**

	Qtr 1 2020	Qtr 2 2020	Qtr 3 2020	Qtr 4 2020	Annual 2020	Qtr 1 2021
<b>Average employment</b>	32,615	6,235	12,836	22,249	18,392	16,643

Source: *Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages*

In a survey collected by the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative (CHNSC) in April 2020, workers reported facing economic insecurity, particularly those in single-income households or those with family members whose jobs had also been impacted by COVID-19 closures. Owners were also grappling with how to pay workers and cover their expenses before reopening. More than half (54%) of workers and nearly 1 in 2 owners (48%) were unsure if they would be able to afford food and other necessities over the following month.

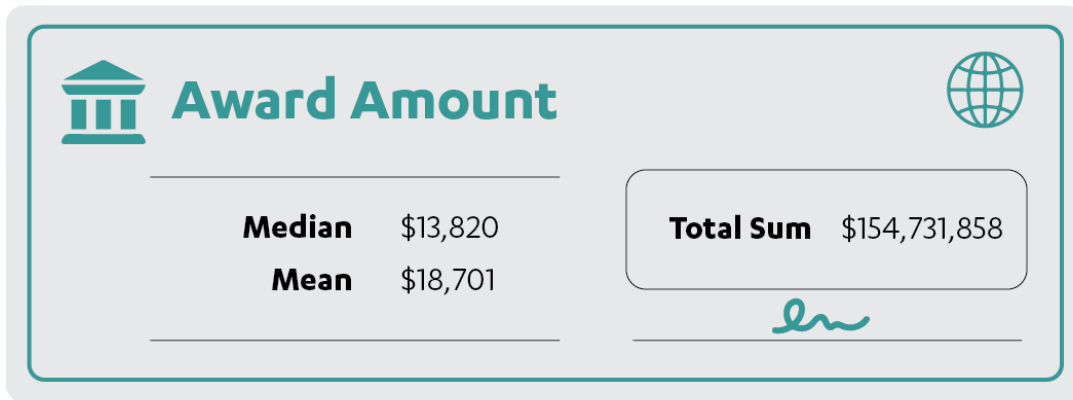
Owners were also concerned about paying commercial rent while their businesses remained closed, and over one-third reported that they were unable to pay rent at the time of the previous survey.<sup>12</sup> Many owners used their savings or borrowed money from friends or family to pay commercial rent for their salon that sat empty during the most restrictive times of the lockdown and continue to struggle with slow business since reopening. Many had to sell their nail salons.

## Paycheck Protection Program

This economic hardship led owners to rely on federal and state aid. In March of 2020, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) was established as part of the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act). The aid was provided in the form of business loans that helped small businesses keep their workers on payroll. Overall, funds were used to pay for payroll costs, benefits, mortgage interests, rent, utilities, protection for workers in relation to COVID-19, property damage not covered by insurance, and some costs and expenses for operation. We provide an analysis of PPP data compiled by the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) up to August 2021. The data includes workplace and loan information as well as recipient characteristics.

The Small Business Administration awarded \$154 million to 8,281 nail salon businesses and individuals in California, with a median loan amount of \$13,820.

**Figure 2: Award Amount for Nail Salons in California**



*Source: Authors' Analysis POGO COVID Relief Spending Tracker*

Those that qualified for this aid included sole proprietors, independent contractors, self-employed individuals, and small businesses that met the U.S. Small Business Administration size standards. The majority (73%) of the PPP loan nail salon recipients identified as individuals, 27% were small businesses, and less than 1% identified as nonprofits with 501c3 status. Most businesses (89%) had been established for two years or more. Over eight in ten received awards under \$25,000. The majority of PPP loans (90%) helped support between one to ten jobs.

Table 3: PPP Loan and Workplace Information

### Nail Salon Business Types

Individual	73%
Small Business	27%
Non-profit with 501c3 status	<1%

### Award Amount

\$5,000 or less	22%
\$5,001-\$10,000	19%
\$10,001-\$15,000	13%
\$15,001-\$20,000	11%
\$20,001-\$25,000	17%
\$25,001-\$30,000	4%
More than \$30,000	14%

### Age of business

Existing or more than 2 years old	89%
New business or 2 years or less	11%

### Nail Salon Jobs Supported in CA

1-10	90%
More than 11	10%

Source: Authors' Analysis POGO COVID Relief Spending Tracker

In terms of demographics for recipients, the majority are Asian (73%), some identified as Black or African American (16%), 6% identified as Latinx, and a smaller pool are White (4%), and less than 1% are Native Hawaiian or Native American. More than seven in ten identified as female, and 28% are male. A small portion, 2% identified as veterans. The top five counties of PPP recipients were Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Santa Clara.



Table 4: PPP Loan Recipient Characteristics

### Race/Ethnicity

Asian	73%
Black or African American	16%
Latinx	6%
White	4%
Native Hawaiian	<1%
Native American	<1%

### Gender

Female-Owned	73%
Male-Owned	27%

### Veteran Status

Non-veteran	98%
Veteran	2%

### Top 5 Counties

Los Angeles	27%
Orange	14%
San Diego	7%
San Bernardino	6%
Santa Clara	5%

Source: Authors' Analysis POGO COVID Relief Spending Tracker

## The Future for Nail Salons

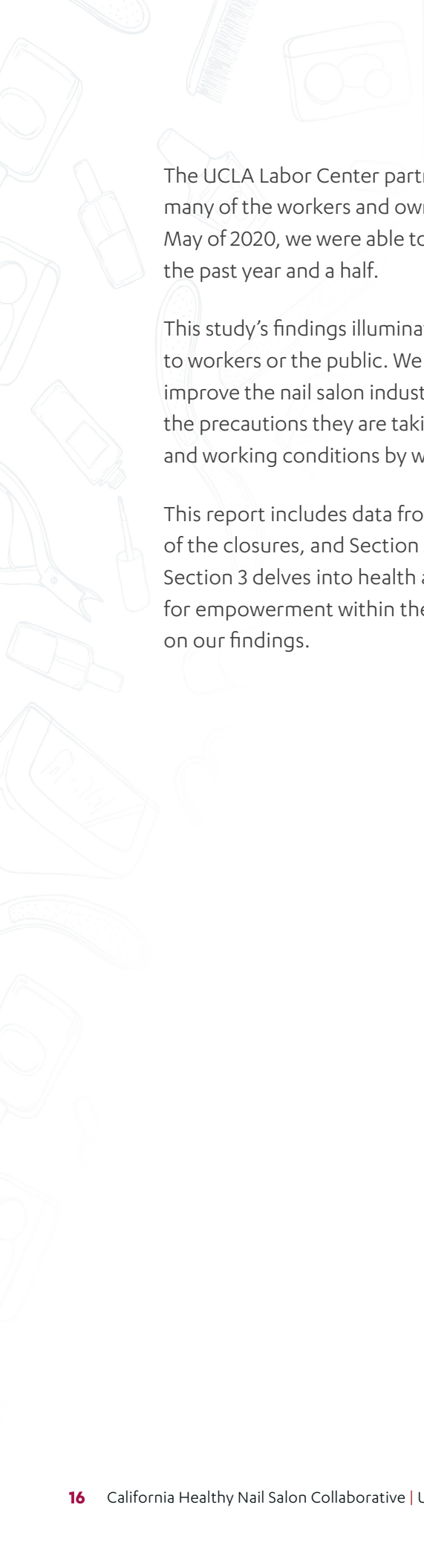
The nail salon industry has adapted to changing circumstances. According to a 2021 report by IBIS World, the nail industry is expected to bounce back within the next five years.<sup>13</sup> The rate of recovery is, of course, dependent on widespread immunization efforts and rising household incomes that allow consumers to return to spending on products and services nail salons have to offer. In a Gallup Poll conducted before the surge of cases related to the new SARS-CoV-2, Delta variant, the majority of Americans (66%) expressed that their lives are “somewhat” or “completely” back to normal.<sup>14</sup>

The Delta variant, however, poses a potential problem for businesses that rely on foot traffic. In the Momentive Small Business Survey conducted by CNBC, 60% of small business owners reported that the uncertainty brought about by it has impacted their outlook for the remainder of the year.<sup>15</sup> And some workers have been reluctant to return to work for health and safety concerns or caregiving responsibilities.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, anti-Asian sentiments have also risen and have impacted the nail salon industry and the community of which is largely comprised.<sup>17</sup> In addition, commercial rent payments and rising costs related to COVID-19 have continued to financially strain owners.

## About this Study

As of now, there are limited studies concerning the nail salon industry and the impacts of COVID-19. We aim to contribute to the existing knowledge by examining how business owners and workers are navigating reopening. This report is the second in a series of studies documenting the impact of COVID-19 on California’s nail salon industry. For the first study, released in June 2020, the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative (“CHNSC”) launched an online survey as part of their emergency assistance aid application process. They collected 636 worker and 90 owner surveys. The survey shows that both workers and owners experienced hardships during the closures.<sup>18</sup>

This study explores the challenges faced by workers and owners in reopening and navigating economic needs and public health risks alike. It is based on a survey fielded via the web and phone between December 2020 and May 2021. This survey included questions about workers, owners, COVID-19 health and safety practices, anti-Asian discrimination, and community needs. The survey was available in English and Vietnamese. The workers and owner surveys were similar but adjusted to account for their distinct perspectives. We surveyed 158 workers and 42 owners in California recruited through the CHNSC’s existing contact lists as well as nail salons listed with the Healthy Nail Salon Recognition Program in five cities and counties. Survey participants were also recruited through word of mouth. In addition, CHNSC recruited and interviewed four workers and two owners about their experiences of the salon closures. Each interview was conducted in Vietnamese.

The background of the page is decorated with faint, light-colored line art illustrations of various nail salon tools and products. These include nail polish bottles, brushes, nail files, nail clippers, and containers of nail polish or gel. The illustrations are scattered across the left and top portions of the page, creating a subtle, thematic backdrop for the text.

The UCLA Labor Center partnered with CHNSC to analyze the data presented in this report. Since many of the workers and owners participated in our first survey, which was conducted in April and May of 2020, we were able to assess how their direct responses and perspectives have changed over the past year and a half.

This study's findings illuminate how the nail salon industry can best reopen without health risks to workers or the public. We examine what resources are available and those that are lacking to improve the nail salon industry. Documenting the experiences of nail salon workers and owners and the precautions they are taking to serve clients can offer meaningful opportunities around the safety and working conditions by which we navigate this pandemic.

This report includes data from both workers and owners. Section 1 focuses on the financial impacts of the closures, and Section 2 explores both worker and owner experiences with reopenings. Section 3 delves into health and safety issues and protections, and Section 4 explores the potential for empowerment within the sector. And we conclude with a series of recommendations centered on our findings.



# 1. Navigating Economic Uncertainty During COVID-19 Closures

Over the past year and half, the nail salon industry has faced a series of openings and closures, which have left both workers and owners to deal with serious economic uncertainty. In this section, we explore the different ways in which workers and owners alike have navigated this period of precarity.

## Sources of Financial Support

Salon closures have been difficult for both workers and owners, and the majority have been unable to find other work during this period. Workers shared with us how they have looked for employment in other service industries, such as restaurants, warehouses, and food and goods delivery. One manicurist, who has been working in nail salons for five years, told how difficult it was to find other jobs in the service industry in the midst of the pandemic. “I was trying to find a job in some restaurants. However, restaurants are to-go only, so they are not in need of staff. After several tries, I had to stay at home in the end.”



**Figure 3: Unable to Find Another Job After March 2020 Stay-at-Home Order**

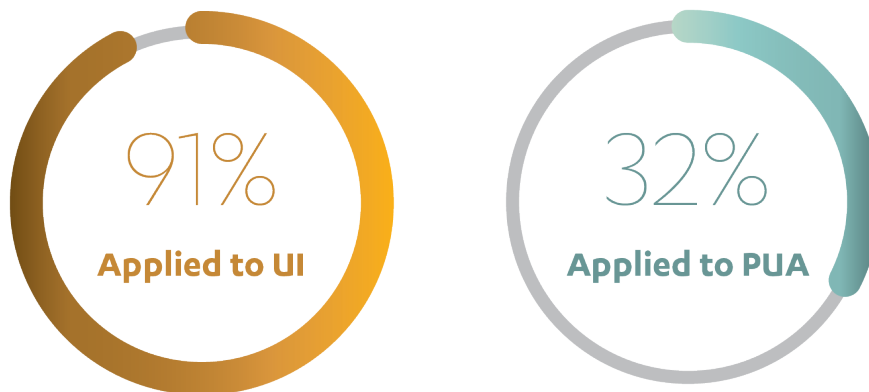


*Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021*

When they secured jobs, some workers were unable to obtain enough hours to earn a living, and had to juggle multiple jobs. As one worker with over eight years in the industry said: “before we were able to go back to work, I was trying to find other kinds of jobs through temp agencies. I found a job with a local school district. Whenever they had a job available, then they called me. At Amazon, I was on-call.”

Unable to survive in this employment environment, nine-in-ten workers were compelled to apply for the state’s unemployment insurance (UI). As part of the federal CARES Act, California extended assistance benefits to unemployed or underemployed workers ineligible for UI—namely part-time workers, gig workers and independent contractors.<sup>19</sup> Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) also provided assistance to workers who had exhausted all of their regular UI benefits or did not qualify for them.<sup>20</sup> Our survey found that nearly one-third (32%) of workers applied for this benefit.

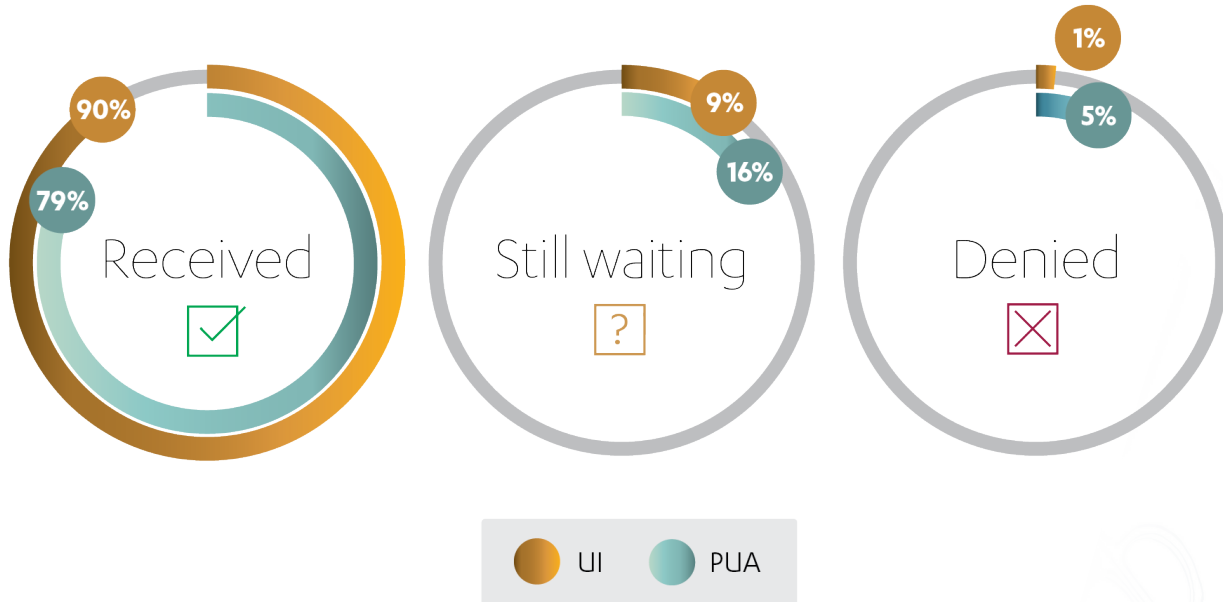
**Figure 4: Unemployment insurance (UI) and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)**



*Source: Nail Salon COVID-Worker Survey 2021*

Of those who applied for UI, the majority received their unemployment insurance, and about one-tenth were still waiting for a decision on their claims. Of those that applied for PUA, most were approved and received benefits though 16% were still waiting, and 5% were denied.

**Figure 5: UI and PUA Application Status**



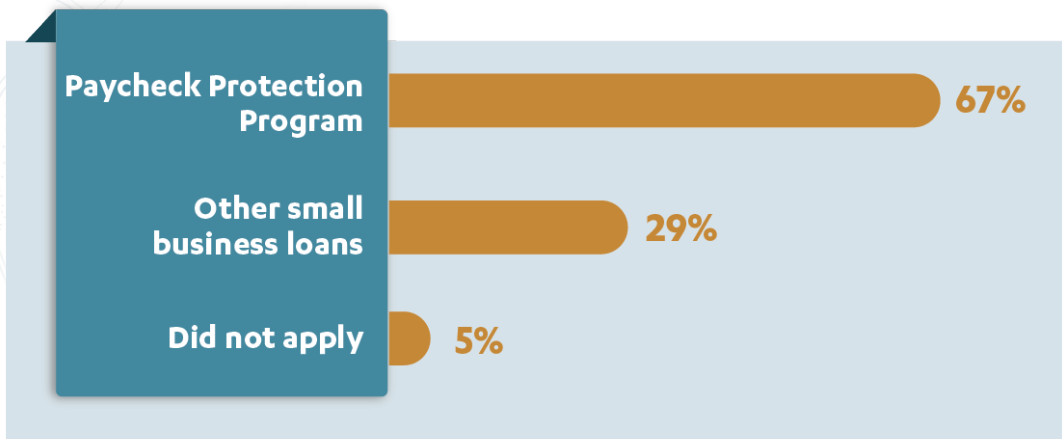
Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

Many workers noted how difficult it was to navigate the UI and PUA application process. Some shared that the process was too complicated and that the forms were not available in their language. Others did not know where to access information or how to manage financially while their claims were being processed.

Given the economic precarity that many were already experiencing even before the pandemic, many lacked emergency savings to fall back on and lived paycheck-to-paycheck. For instance, one worker we interviewed who lacked savings shared that she had to rely on help from her son during the three-month period in which her unemployment claim was processed.

Most owners, contrarily, were able to tap into government programs for support during the closure. Over two-thirds of owners were able to apply for the paycheck protection program (PPP) and one-quarter applied for other small business loans.

Figure 6: Nail Salon Owner's Applied to PPP or Other Small Business Loans



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

Of those that applied, most said that they received the funding, but a few were still waiting and one owner was denied. Some felt that the process to apply for financial assistance for their nail salons was too complicated, and that oftentimes, information was not available in their language. Others reported not knowing how to access information or where to receive assistance with filling out forms.

One owner, who has been in the nail salon industry for nearly 30 years said, “When I lost my income, I applied for EDD. However, the process was very slow so my husband had to support me. It was better once I got the EDD, though I was still short.” As a result, she had to apply for a zero interest loan to meet her financial obligations. Reflecting on the unemployment assistance application process, she commented, “I made some mistakes because I am not used to computers. The questions were so unclear that I got confused and gave incorrect answers. I wish the application form was available in Vietnamese, which would help our community a lot.”

About three-fourths of those who applied to PPP noted that the amount received was not enough to cover their business expenses. Some owners found the assistance insufficient to cover their commercial rent debt. And while both California and the federal government have enacted eviction moratoriums, they apply solely to residential rents. Many jurisdictions in the state have enacted eviction moratoriums that cover commercial tenancies, but only a few remain in effect.<sup>21</sup>

One owner, reflecting on the burden of commercial rent debt, shared, “I have trouble not making enough money to pay rent while the landlord does not accept any deduction. During the lockdown, the nail salons were forced to close but we still had to pay full rent. I am told that the landlord got some grant from the government; then why did the tenants like us not receive anything? I hope there is a program to help the tenants.”



## 2. Returning to Nail Salons: The Experience of Workers and Owners with Reopening

Most nail salons in California closed for nearly one-half of the year, and some even longer. When nail salons finally reopened, customers returned slowly and staffing was reduced. This section covers the experience of workers and owners during reopening.

### Reopening Nail Salons

Salon closures clearly hit both workers and owners hard, and many were anxious to get back to work. When we conducted our initial survey in April and May of 2020, 99% of workers hoped to continue working in salons once they reopened, and nearly three-in-four felt that it was either likely or very likely that their salon would rehire them. Owners also shared this perspective, with nine-in-ten believing that they would likely rehire all their staff. However, about 14% of owners were unsure they would be able to reopen once restrictions were lifted.<sup>22</sup>

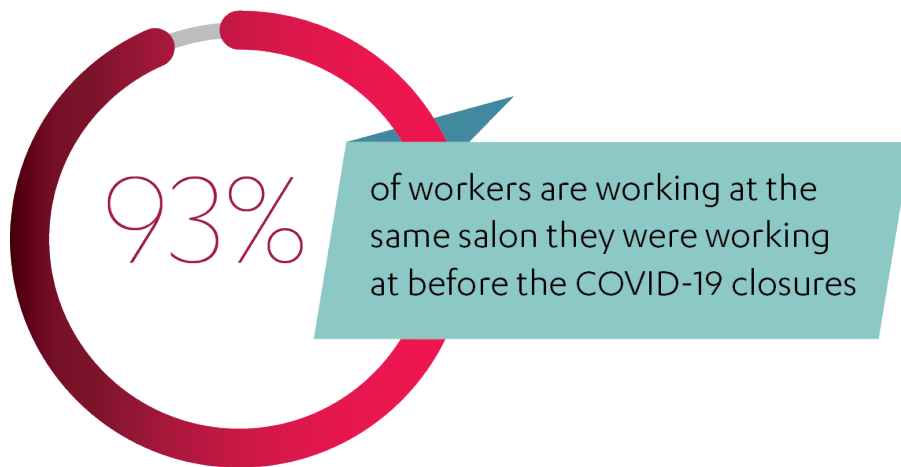
Every owner we surveyed reported that their nail salons had reopened—except for one who owned three nail salons, and one of which had to close down permanently. All but one of the owners in our survey owned only a single salon.

One, who opened their salon in 2006, faced mounting debt on their commercial lease, and had to decide to close their nail salon:

I did not want to open my salon anymore because of COVID. Even if I reopen the store, I am not sure I can make enough money to cover the rental fees of the past year. During COVID last year, I applied for the PPP loan of the government but I got rejected. Then I talked to the landlord to ask for a reduction in the rent, but he did not accept. When the store was closed, the tenants did not have to pay rent; however, if the salon was back to work, I had to pay 100% of the rent for the closing time. That is such a big amount of debt that I don't know if I'd have enough customers to pay it off.

Of all of the workers we surveyed reported returning to work, about nine-in-ten were working in the same salons in which they had worked before the March 2020 closures.

**Figure 7: Rehired at Salon**



*Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

However, not all workers returned to work in the same salons. In fact, once nail salons reopened, 89% of workers and 84% of owners surveyed shared that their salon downsized. Nearly half (47%) of the workers and owners (29%) reported that the number of their workers and co-workers had decreased by four or more workers per nail salon—particularly concerning given that the industry is dominated by mom-and-pop nail salons. Based on our national study of the industry, we found that more than two-thirds have fewer than five workers, and one-quarter have between five and nine workers.<sup>23</sup>



Table 5: Change in Number at Workers at Salon

Number Change	Worker-Reported	Owner-Reported
0	11%	16%
-1	8%	18%
-2	20%	18%
-3	14%	18%
-4	19%	16%
-5+	28%	13%

Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

Only one-tenth of owners were able to fully hire all their staff when they reopened.

Figure 8: Owners Rehired All Nail Salon Staff Employed Before COVID-19



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

Of those unable to rehire any of their workers, 74% said it was because the salon did not have enough customers, and 42% said they could not afford to employ all of their prior staff. Additionally, about one-quarter had to reduce their staff in order to maintain physical distancing guidelines.

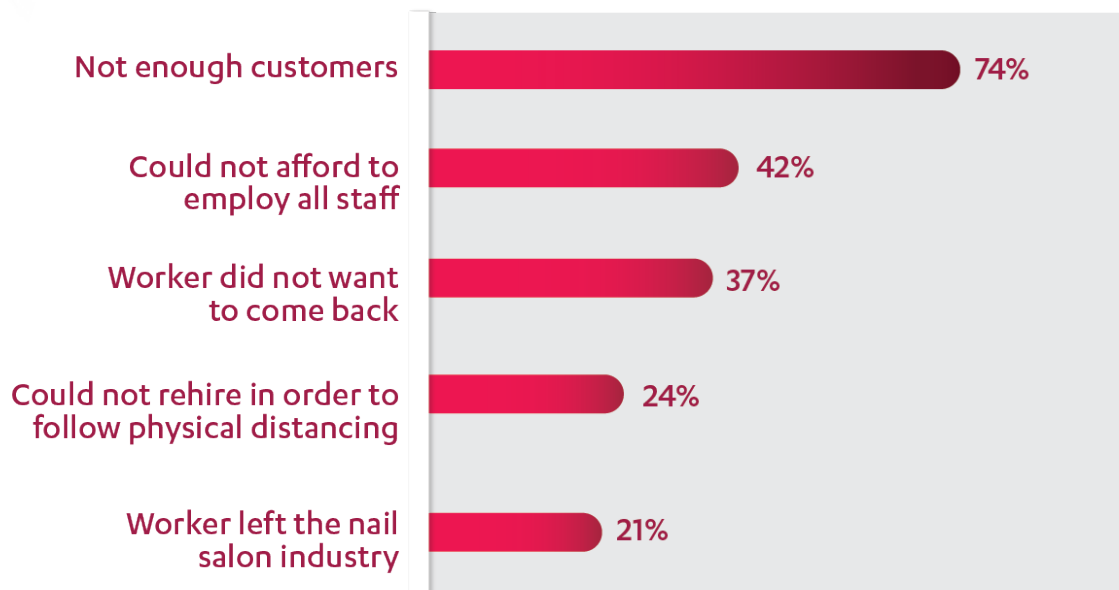
We interviewed a manicurist who had worked in the industry for over 20 years before losing her job due to COVID-19, and who said:

Due to the pandemic, people are working at home, so there are no customers coming to my salon. I am too old to change to another salon. Other salons don't hire more workers either. Actually, I was trying to apply for some salons but it did not work. I was also looking for different kinds of jobs too, but I don't have many chances because I am older.

Research indicates that, nationally, only one-third of manicurists are between the ages of 45 and 64, which suggests that owners may prefer to hire younger workers, as the repetitive, detailed, and fast-paced work can be less suited for older workers.<sup>24</sup>

Over one-third of owners surveyed believed that workers did not want to come back to the salon. The service sector, in general, experienced a labor shortage as workers became hesitant to return due to low wages, health and safety concerns, and lack of childcare.<sup>25</sup> And, importantly, most nail salons were allowed to reopen before COVID-19 vaccines were widely available, and so many workers felt that the risk was far too high, especially if they lived in intergenerational households or with immunocompromised people.

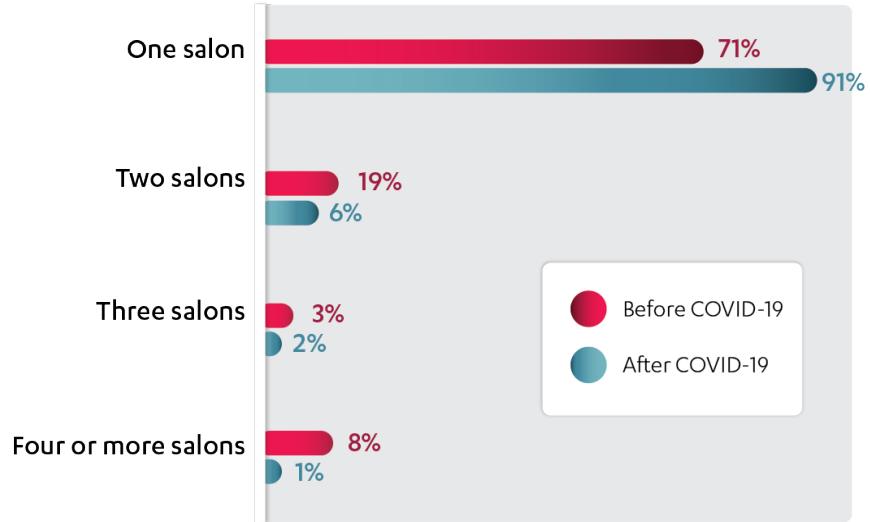
**Figure 9: Reasons Why Owners Did Not Rehire All of Their Staff**



Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021*

Before the pandemic, almost one-third of workers (29%) were at multiple nail salons. Once nail salons reopened, however, only one-tenth were able to find work at more than one salon.

**Figure 10: Number of Nail Salons Workers Worked At**

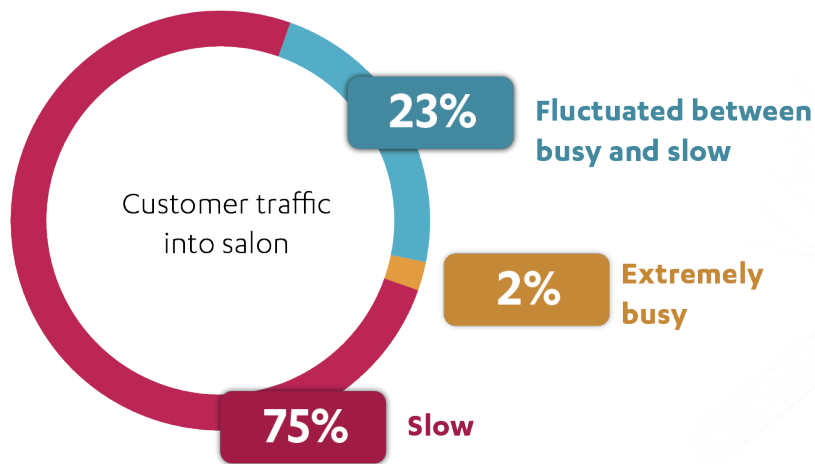


Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

## Business Impacts and Changes in Nail Salons

Workers noted the reduction in business after reopening. Three-quarters reported that their salon had been slow during the week before the survey was taken.

**Figure 11: Customer Traffic into Salon**

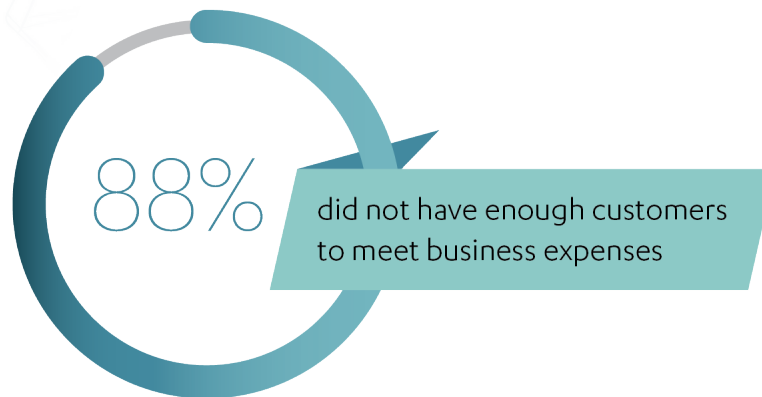


Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

One owner reflected on the reduced business: “After COVID, everything won’t be the same as it was. I accept the fact that the salons will never be as crowded as they used to be because money can’t be equal to health.”

Unsurprisingly, the reduced customer flow had a heavy financial impact on owners. Nearly nine-in-ten owners reported not having enough customers to meet their business expenses.

**Figure 12: Business Expenses**



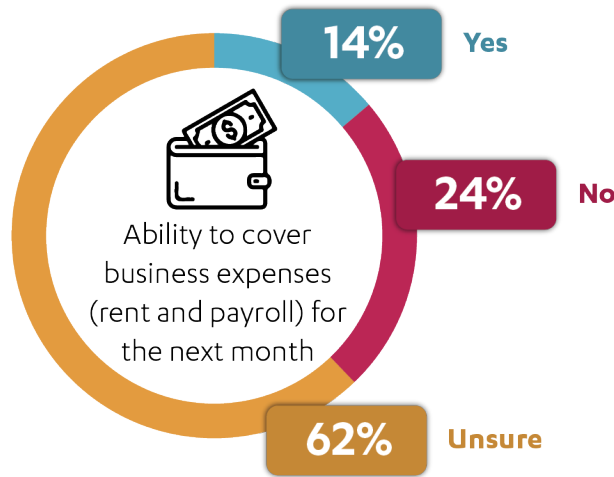
*Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021*

Reflecting on this decline, one said:

No customers are coming. People are still afraid of the pandemic. There is no special occasion or party so my customers do not need to have their nails done. However, as the salon owner, I still have to open my salon to clean it up, answer phones, and wait for customers. I also have to make my salon meet all the safety requirements because officers can visit to check suddenly. It is so boring without customers that I want to close the salon.

The financial implications for owners are dire. Only 14% were confident that they would be able to cover business expenses—such as rent and payroll—over the next month. Nearly two-thirds were unsure, and one-quarter felt they would.

**Figure 13: Able to Cover Business Expenses Such as Rent and Payroll for the Next Month**

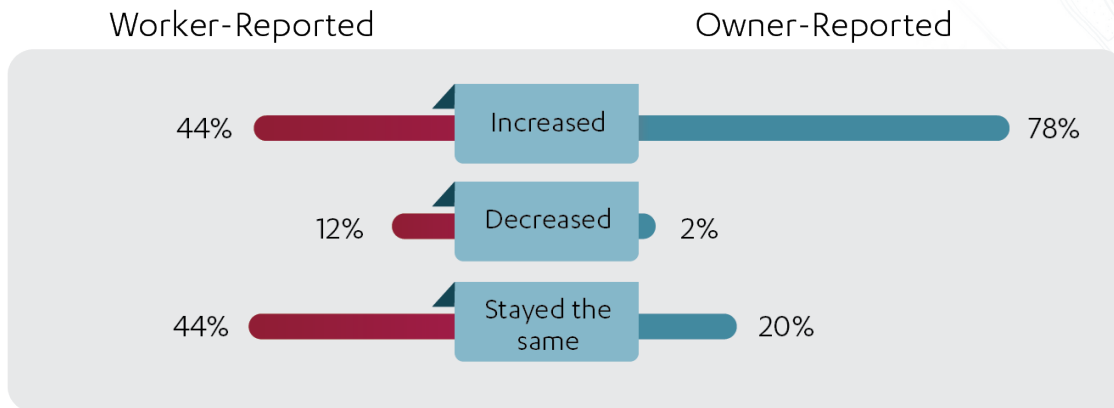


Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

One owner shared, “The landlord keeps asking for rent while there are no customers. It’s because of COVID, it’s not my fault if I cannot pay rent... I just want customers to come.” In comparing business revenue during 2020 to pre-pandemic levels, she added, “the income of this year is not 10% compared to last year’s.”

Due to the costs of COVID-19 health and safety modifications such as installing plexiglass dividers, improving ventilation, and providing masks and gloves, many nail salons had to raise prices. About 44% of workers and 78% of owners surveyed indicated that the price of services at their nail salon increased since reopening—between \$1 to \$10 per service. Workers reported the median price increase for a manicure was \$4.00, \$3.50 for a pedicure and \$5 for a manicure and pedicure. Similarly, owners reported a \$5 median increase for gel manicures.

**Figure 14: Price Changes in Nail Services Before and After COVID-19**



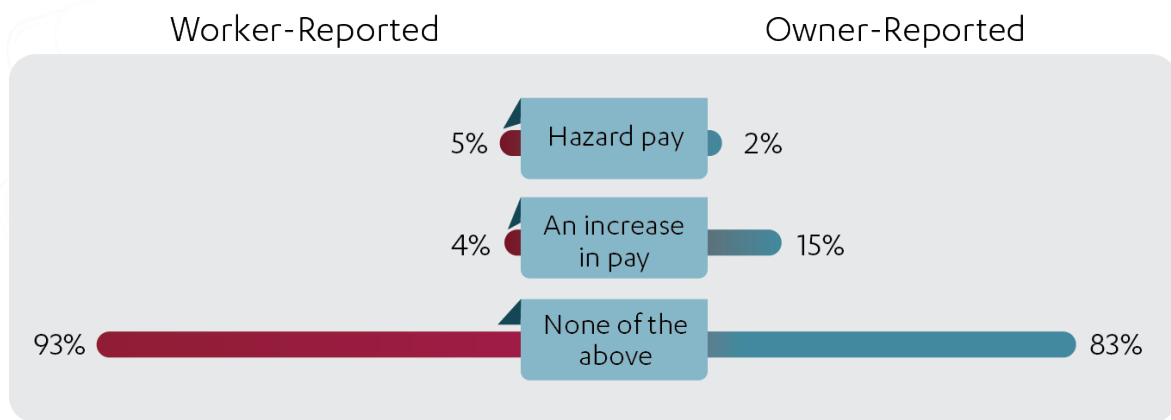
Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021



## Hours and Earnings

To recognize the increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 that comes from doing certain jobs, many cities and counties in California passed temporary hazard pay ordinances requiring employers in essential industries, such as grocery, retail and drug stores, to pay workers a wage premium. Nail salon workers, however, were not considered essential and were therefore excluded from these protections.<sup>26</sup> Though nail salons reopened while the pandemic was still rampant and little research had been conducted, most workers didn't receive any additional pay. As a result, they received zero additional financial support despite the fact they continued to work under the increasingly perilous risk of exposure to COVID-19. And despite working in very close contact with clients for extended periods of time while often within small-business settings, more than nine-in-ten workers reported they did not receive hazard pay or an increase in pay while working during COVID-19.

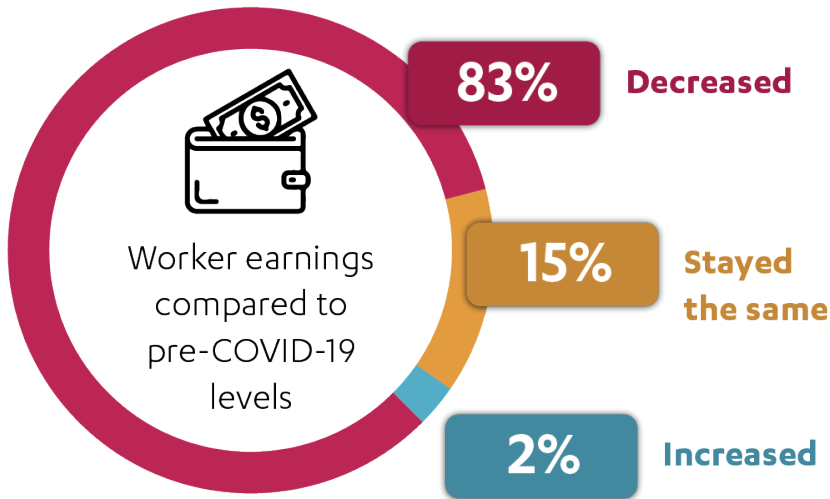
Figure 15: Hazard Pay During COVID-19



Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

Workers were making less than they did before the pandemic. This could be due to reduced hours, customer flow, tips, and increased owner costs such as PPE, plexiglass dividers and disinfectants. They also may not have received any form of additional pandemic compensation. The majority (83%) of workers reported a reduction in their earnings.

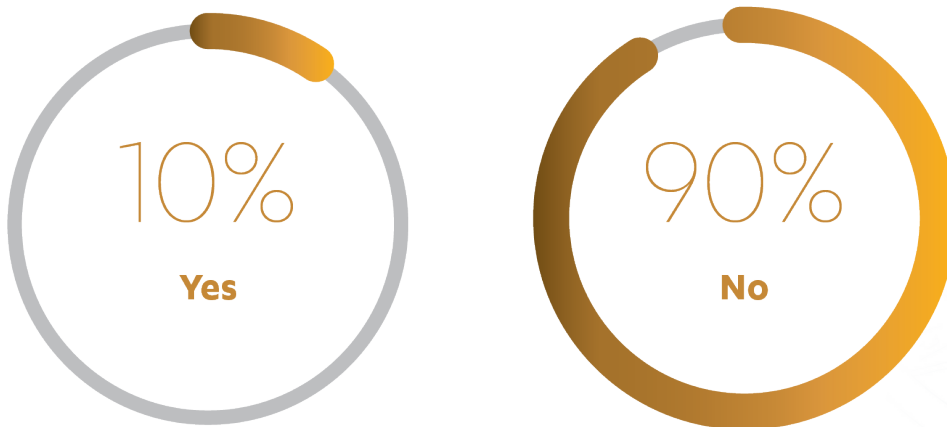
Figure 16: Worker Earnings Compared to Pre-COVID-19 Levels



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021

Workers were earning less, even as most owners (90%) reported not making any pay cuts to workers after reopening.

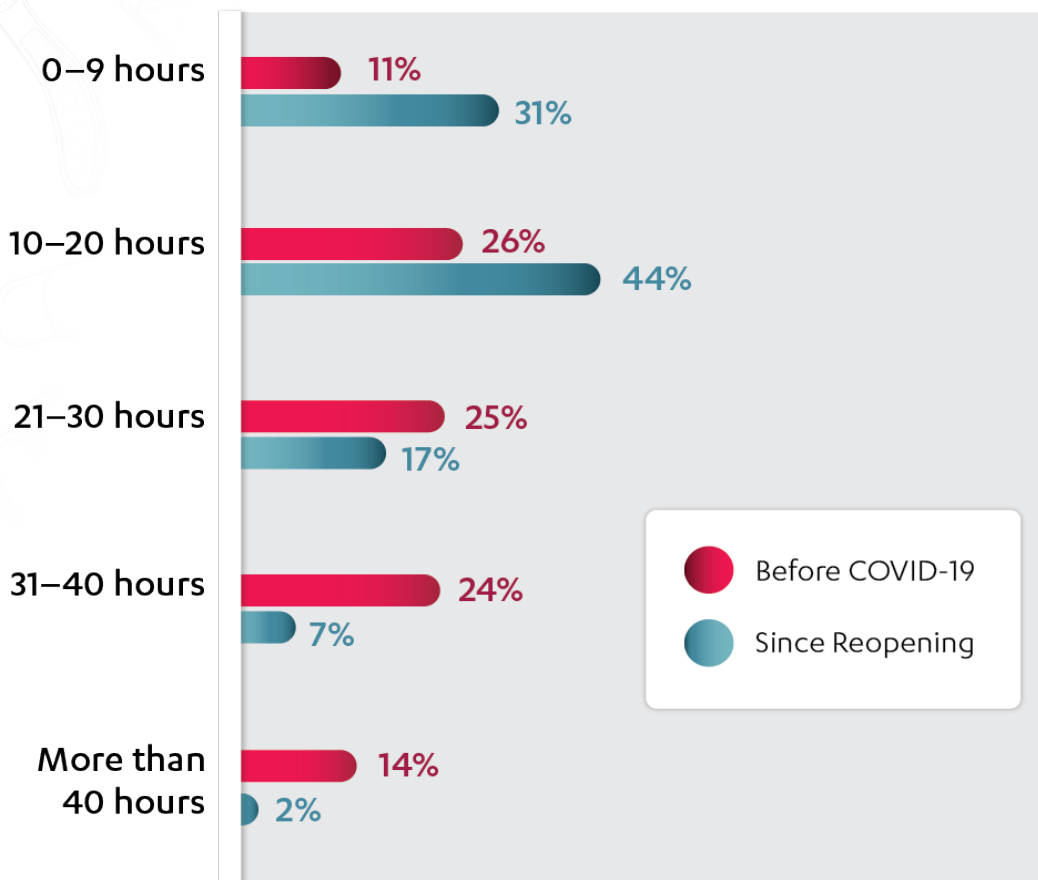
Figure 17: Owners Cut Worker Pay



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

The number of hours nail salon workers worked also changed dramatically after nail salons reopened. The number working 20 or less hours a week doubled, with 75% of workers compared to 37% before the pandemic. Similarly, while 38% of workers had worked more than 30 hours per week on average in the period immediately preceding COVID-19, only 9% of workers reported having that many hours since reopening.

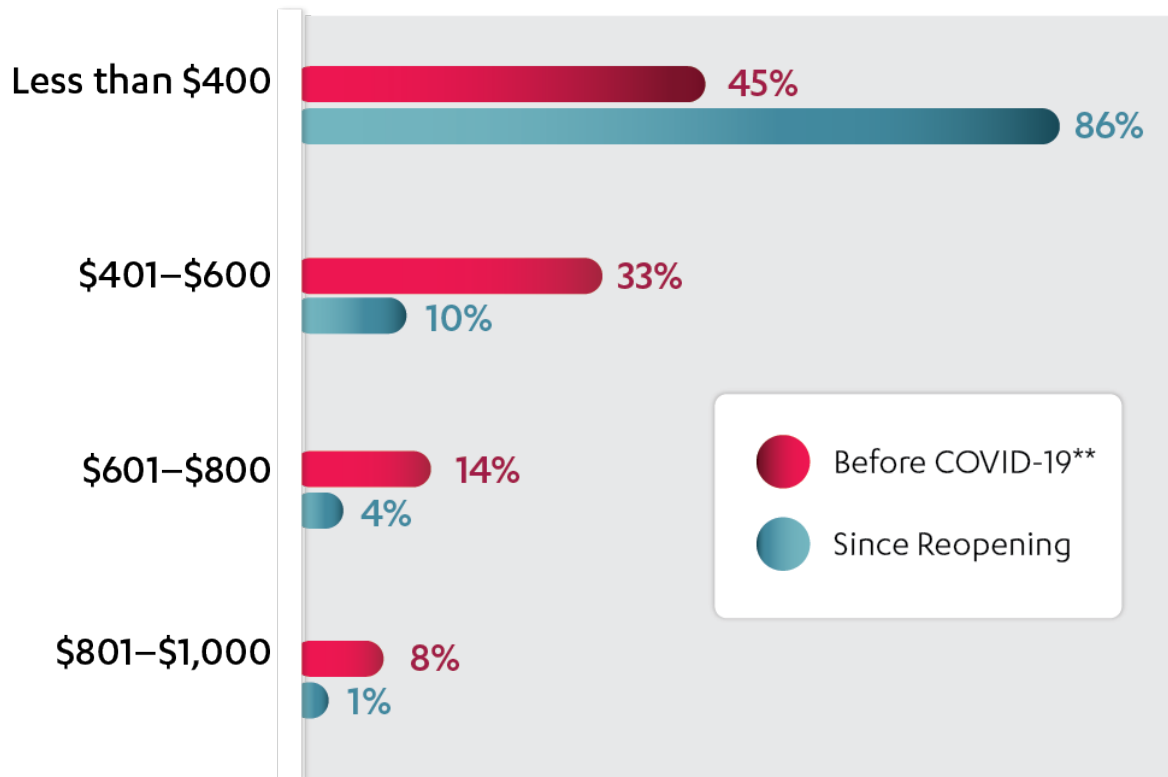
**Figure 18: Average Weekly Hours Worked, Before COVID-19, and After Reopening**



*Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

Between reduced hours and stagnant wages, workers were making significantly less than before the pandemic, which was already low. The majority of workers (86%) were earning less than \$400 per week when nail salons reopened. Remarkably, when we conducted the initial survey in April and May 2020, the rate of workers earning less than \$400 per week was 45% pre-COVID.

Figure 19: Estimated Weekly Income for Nail Salon Workers



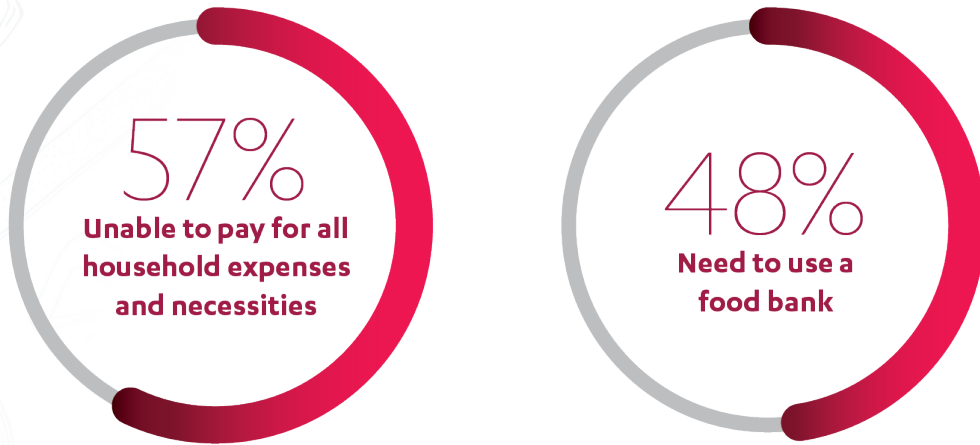
Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*, \*\* *"A Survey of Nail Salon Workers and Owners in California During COVID-19" 2020*.

The impact has been significant as the virus upends workers' hours and pay. Speaking on the impact of reduced business on workers' earnings, one manicurist shared, "Now, although the COVID-19 pandemic is over and the salon is open again, I want to quit my job. It is because supplies are so expensive while we have no customers. Everyone is still afraid of the pandemic."

## Economic Fallout

While owners and workers were back on the job, they still had difficulty paying for essential household expenses, such as food, housing, and other necessities. Nearly 60% of workers struggled to afford these expenses, and one-half indicated they needed to utilize food banks after COVID-19 began. The prevalence of economic and food insecurity among nail salon workers is particularly concerning, considering that 55% have school-age children in their household.

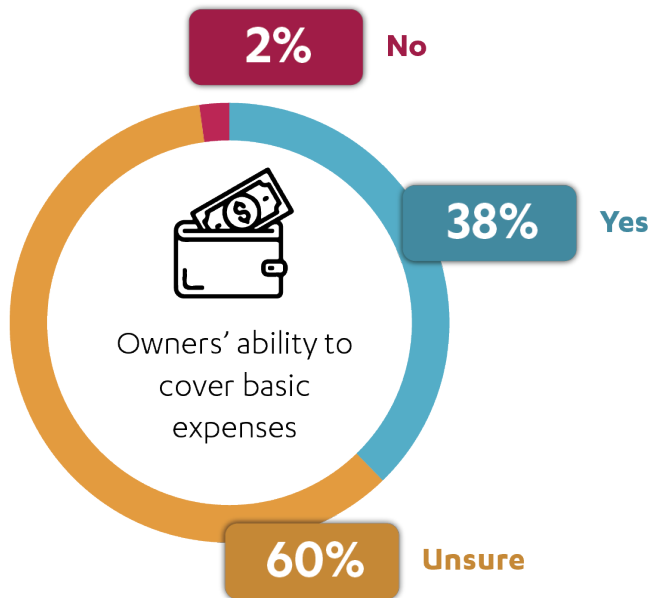
Figure 20: Workers' Ability to Cover Basic Expenses



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021

Among owners, 60% reported being uncertain about their ability to pay for food and other necessities for the next month.

Figure 21: Owner's Ability to Cover Basic Expenses



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021



Reflecting on their financial hardship, one owner shared, “The nail industry is really difficult, the owner needs a lot of support to pay for rent and pay the workers.” Another owner commented that, “It is hard for nail salon owners: we have to spend on maintaining the nail salons [and] pay rent while having no customers. So poor for small businesses like us.”

The economic fallout resulting from COVID-19 has affected not only workers and owners, but the families and communities that derive their livelihoods from nail salons. Reflecting on this, an owner offered a striking remark on the devastation felt by many in the industry, “We, the first generation immigrating to the U.S., have been working hard in nail salons all day long to raise kids, support family, pay rent, etc. Now, COVID doesn’t kill us but makes us unemployed. We don’t know what to do; we are too old to work in factories.”

## Anti-Asian Racism and Discrimination

The past year saw an unprecedented level of violence and discrimination against Asian Americans.<sup>27</sup> Nail salon workers, most of whom are Asian, were especially vulnerable as a visible workforce in the service sector. Recent reporting indicates that about 30% of hate incidents have occurred in a place of business, and that Asian women have experienced twice as many incidents as Asian men.<sup>28</sup> Our survey found that 14% of workers have experienced discrimination in their workplace that they suspected was a result of their race or ethnicity. The lower rate of reporting may be due to hesitancy in providing that information in the survey.

**Figure 22: Workers’ Experiences of Discrimination**



Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

Among owners, 19% had personally experienced anti-Asian discrimination, and 14% had witnessed their workers being harassed or discriminated against due to their race or ethnicity. We note that these figures, as well as worker-reported instances of harassment and discrimination, are likely not representative of the industry. Anecdotal data suggest that the levels of anti-Asian discrimination experienced by owners and workers alike is much higher than what we report here.

**Figure 23: Owners' Experiences of Anti-Asian Discrimination**



Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021*

According to Stop AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) Hate, an organization tracking reports of hate incidents against Asian Americans, verbal harassment and shunning—the deliberate avoidance of Asian Americans—make up the largest proportion of incidents reported.<sup>29</sup>

Speaking on the subject of instances of harassment at the workplace, one owner shared, “Once, a person knocked on the door and yelled, ‘go away to your country, do not stay here’. That made us so scared that we called the police.” Another one shared, “Last year, when I was crossing the red light, a man suddenly stopped me and yelled that I was Chinese, and had to go away to China. That made me so scared that I could not move standing there while he kept yelling and screaming, ‘you cannot cross in front of me, wash my shoes or tie my tie.’”

One owner shared that, “One of my American friends told me to close my salon because it is dangerous for me to go home every night after work while some weirdos are wandering around. We do not know how aggressive they can be.”

Others said that they felt customers mistreated them or discriminated against them because of language barriers, “At work, some customers were looking down on me because I could not speak English very well. That made me so sad that I put a lot of effort into improving my English. They thought I was not skillful enough just because my English was not good. They kept complaining and grumbling when I was working. I was very depressed.”



### 3. Keeping Workplaces Safe: Implementing COVID-19 Safety Measures in Nail Salons

After the winter 2020 COVID-19 surge, counties began to reopen again with procedures and safety practices in place. This section explores the COVID-19 prevention and control strategies nail salons implemented once they reopened, and the challenges and concerns owners and workers have experienced as a result.

#### COVID-19 Information

Once nail salons reopened, the majority of workers (98%) received information on how to work safely during COVID-19 and from multiple sources. Workers received information from their employer (60%), the California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (39%), the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative (38%), and from friends and family (28%). Over one-quarter of workers also researched COVID-19 safety guidance on their own. The top source for owners was the Collaborative, followed by the State Board and Public Health departments.

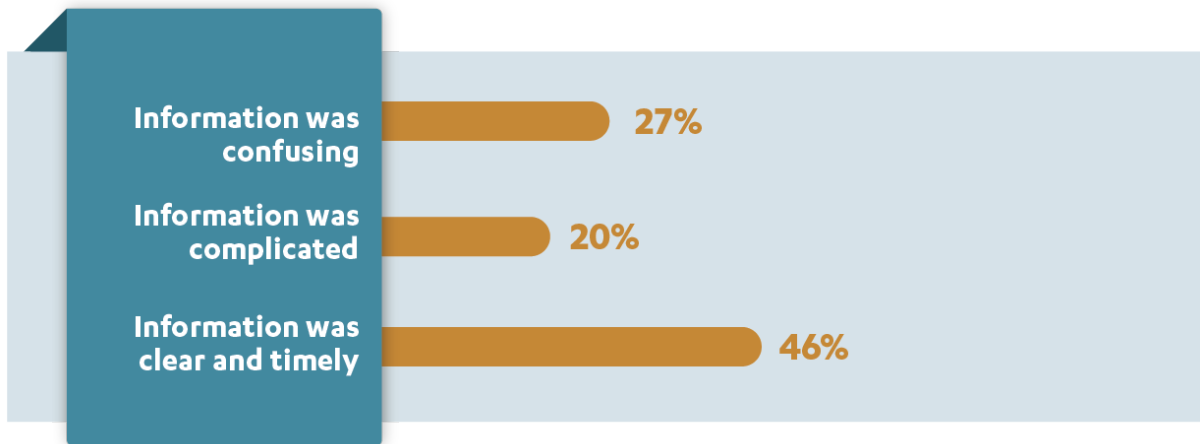
Table 6: Sources of Information on COVID-19 Workplace Safety

	Worker-Reported	Owner-Reported
<b>Employer</b>	60%	-
<b>CA Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative</b>	38%	42%
<b>CA State Board of Barbering and Cosmetology</b>	39%	34%
<b>County Department of Public Health</b>	33%	37%
<b>CA State Department of Public Health</b>	34%	22%
<b>From friend or family member</b>	28%	20%
<b>Did their own research</b>	26%	34%

Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

As far as owners, many reported that information on when they could reopen was rather confusing (27%) or complicated (20%).

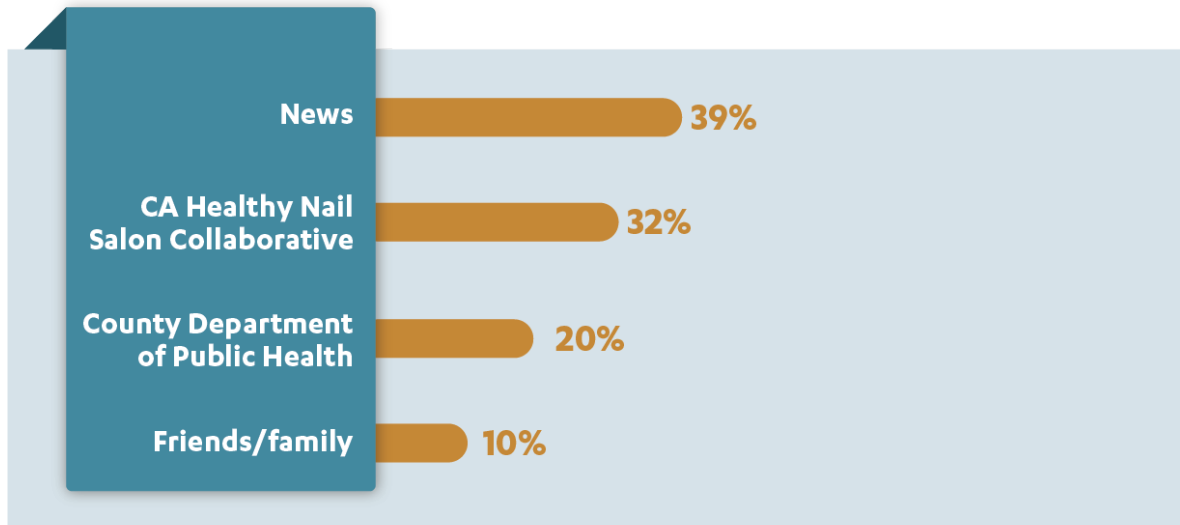
Figure 24: Owners' Perception on Information Received on Reopening



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

When asked about the sources of information used to learn about reopening dates, 39% heard it on the news—including YouTube, social media, and other nontraditional news sources—32% from the CA Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, and 20% from the County Department of Public Health.

Figure 25: Owners' Sources of Information on Reopening Dates



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

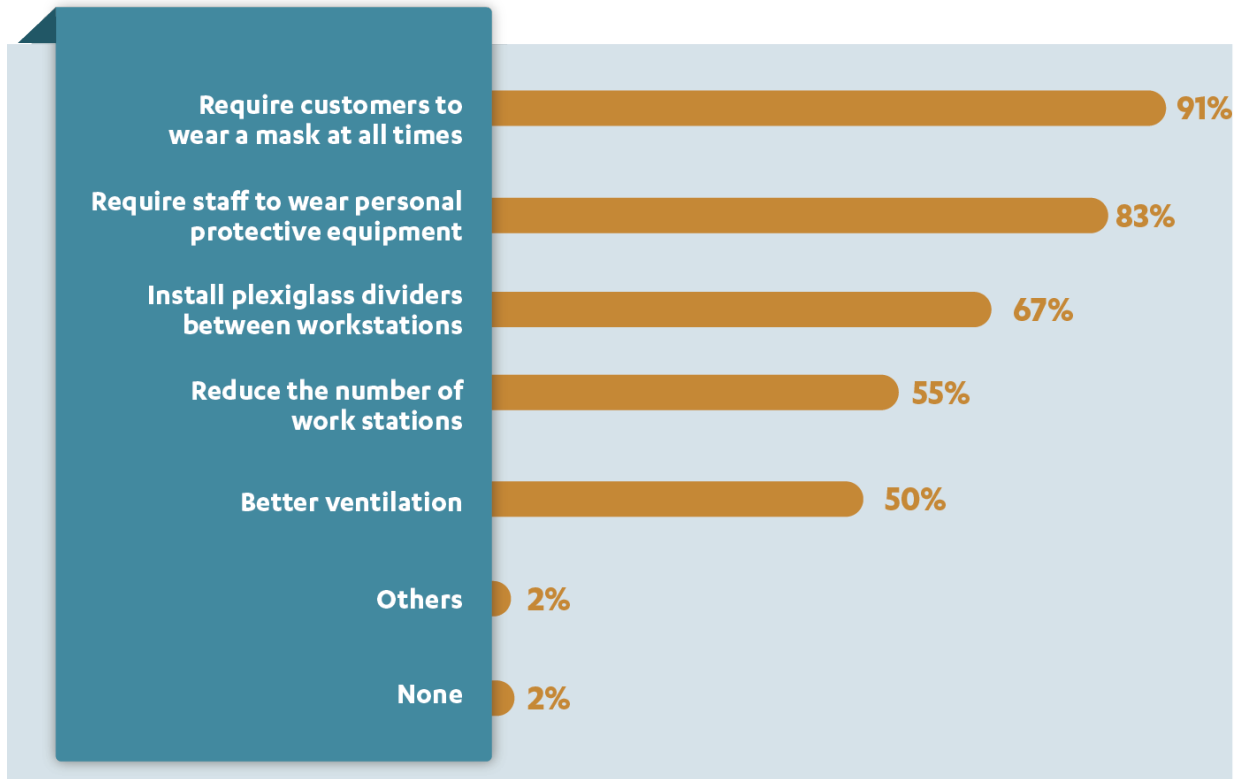
## Workplace COVID-19 Safety Practices

When nail salons and other personal care services were allowed to reopen, the state had advised mask-wearing among workers and customers, frequent handwashing, cleaning and disinfection, and maximizing social distancing—which for nail salons meant reducing the number of workstations and reconfiguring their layout.<sup>30</sup> Nail salons were also encouraged to upgrade ventilation systems or install portable high-efficiency air cleaners.<sup>31</sup> Some counties issued even stricter guidelines, such as restricting indoor operations to 25% capacity.<sup>32</sup>

Owners in our survey closely followed these guidelines to ensure safety: almost all (91%) required mask-wearing for workers and owners, 83% required staff to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), 67% installed plexiglass between workstations or at the cash register, 55% reduced the number of workstations, and 50% improved their ventilation.



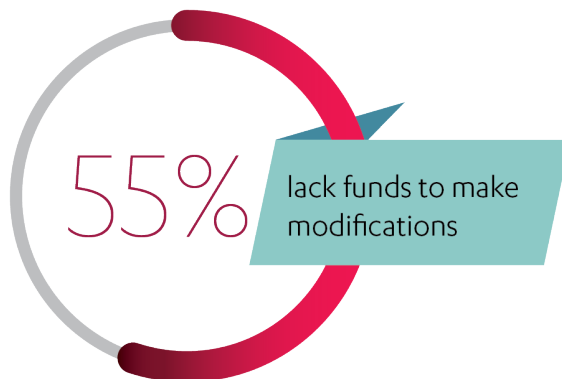
Figure 26: Owner Implemented Salon Modifications to Prevent COVID-19 Exposure



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

More than half (55%) of owners surveyed said that funding was a challenge to make the necessary modifications. These owners would like to upgrade their ventilation systems, install plexiglass, and reduce the number of workstations.

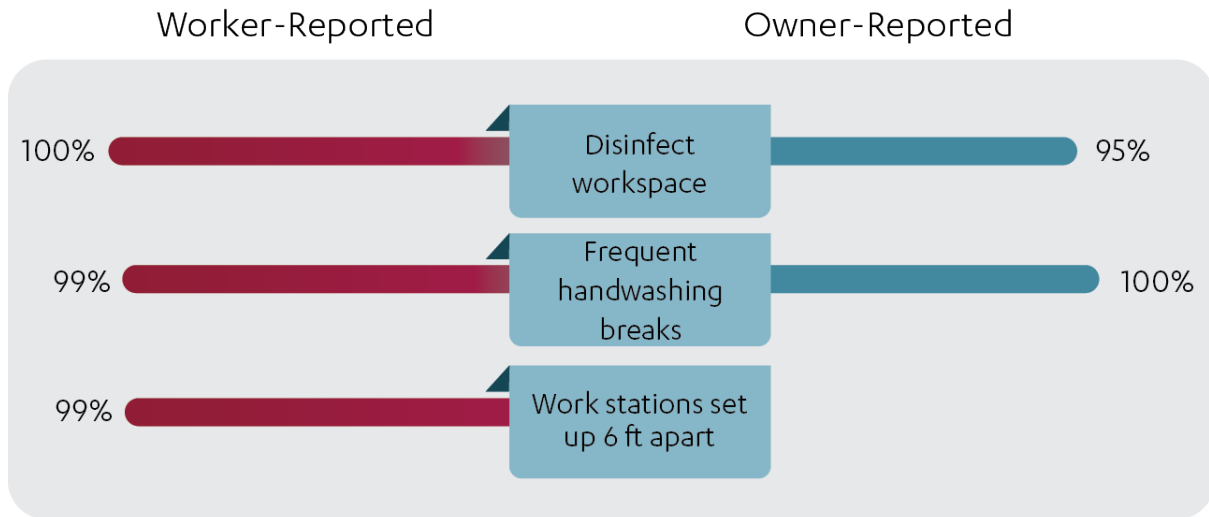
Figure 27: Percent of Owners Lacking Funds to Implement Desired Modifications



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Owner Survey 2021

All workers reported having the ability to disinfect their workspaces between each client, and receiving frequent breaks to wash their hands. Nearly all workers reported having their workstations set up six feet apart. Among owners, 95% said workers were allowed to disinfect between clients and all said workers were allowed to wash their hands frequently.

**Figure 28: Safety Precautions Implemented at Salon**



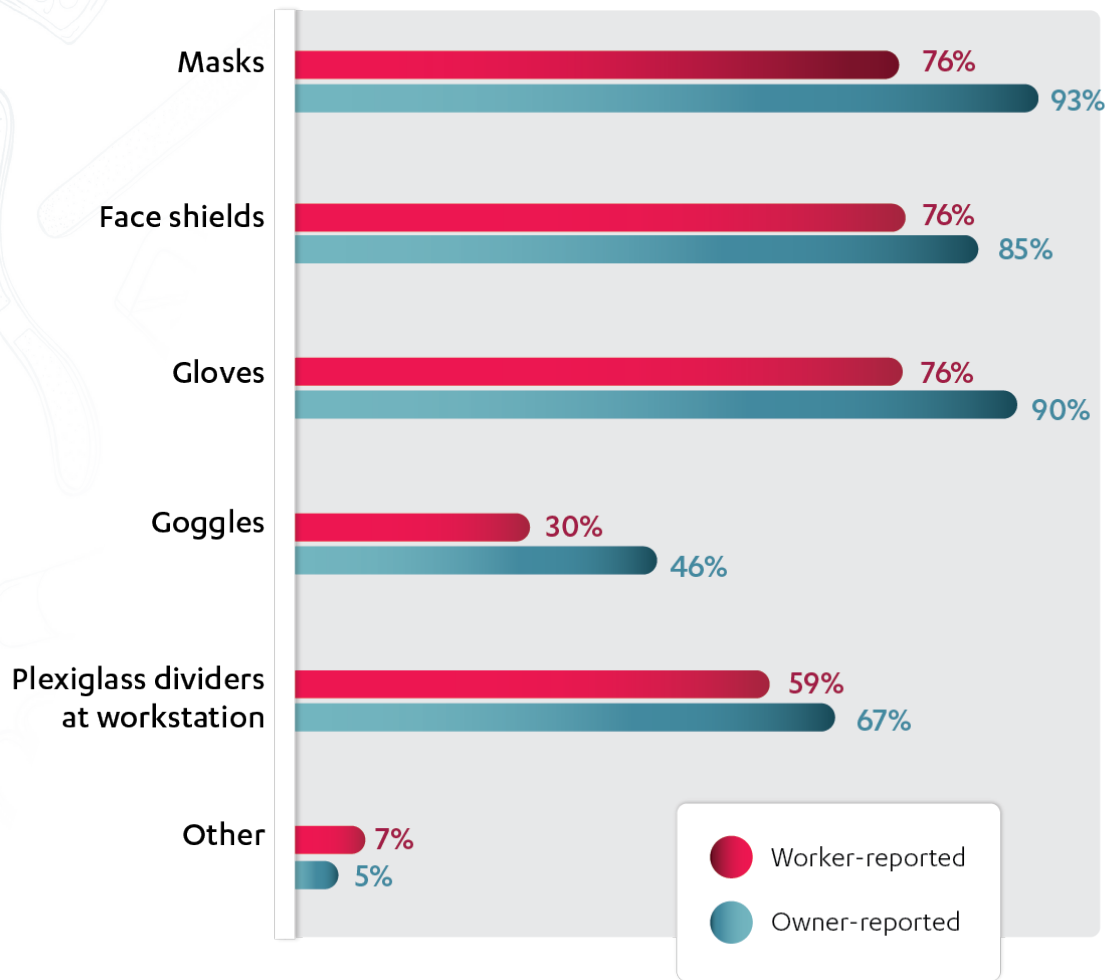
Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021*

One owner explained, “When a customer stands up, I will clean up, spray alcohol, change tools, and wash hands. Now customers are very cautious of safety in nail salons. Even if they are not, I still make my salon clean and safe to protect myself and everyone’s health.”

## PPE and Mask Compliance

Most of the owners in our survey said they had provided their workers with personal protective equipment. As for workers, three-quarters received masks, face shields, or gloves from their employer, and only a third received goggles. In terms of other protective equipment, over half reported having plexiglass dividers between stations.

Figure 29: Employer Provided PPE and Other Protective Equipment

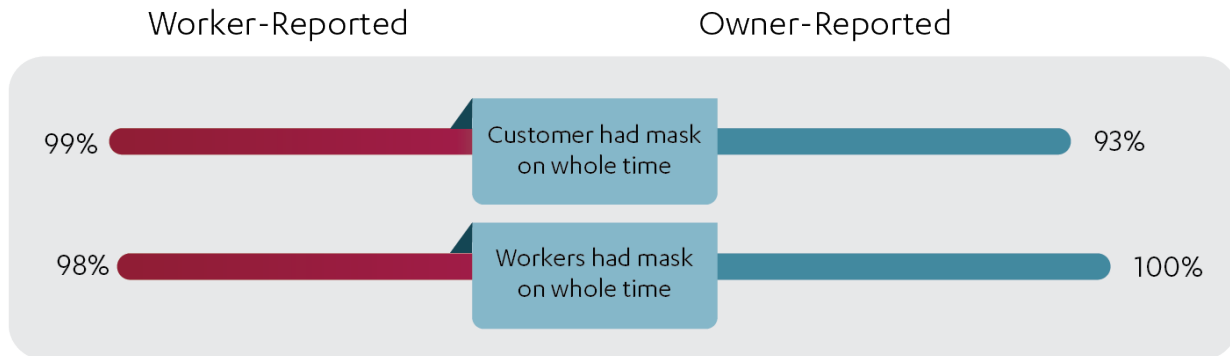


Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

Not all workers have received PPE from their employers. Many have had to purchase their own using their earnings from the salon. “I have to buy all that stuff on my own,” one worker shared. “They say all other nail salons do not provide supplies for employees either. For W2, we are still sharing 45-50% of profit so they do not want to spend on the supply for us.” Having to purchase their own PPE imposed a significant burden on workers, who were already seeing their paychecks squeezed with fewer customers in nail salons.

As for mask-wearing, our survey found that most workers and customers adhere to this practice consistently. Among the owners we surveyed, 7% noted that some customers do not always come into nail salons wearing masks.

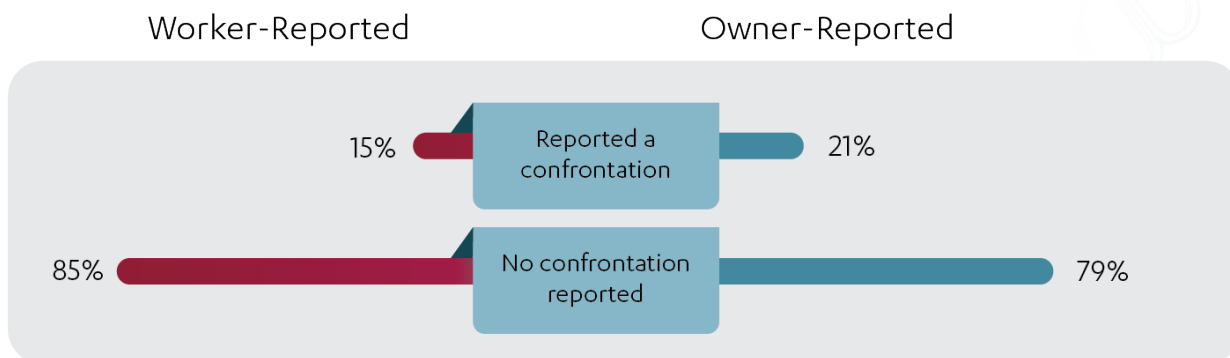
**Figure 30: Mask Wearing Compliance**



Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021*

In fact, 21% of owners and 15% of workers reported having a confrontation around wearing masks inside the salon.

**Figure 31: Reported Confrontations Around Mask Wearing**



Source: *Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021*

Some nail salons are providing masks to customers that didn't have one. One worker shared, "if they [customers] don't have a mask, we'll supply them with the disposable ones." Owners and workers alike felt uncomfortable asking customers to wear a mask, or to put it on properly. One worker shared that they felt at risk when "people [are] not wearing masks right, they wear below the nose and the nose shows or they put it under the chin." Owners and workers also had to ask customers to discard any food or drinks they may have had, or to request that their companions wear masks. One worker in our survey even shared that they felt unsafe when "customers brought their kids without wearing masks."

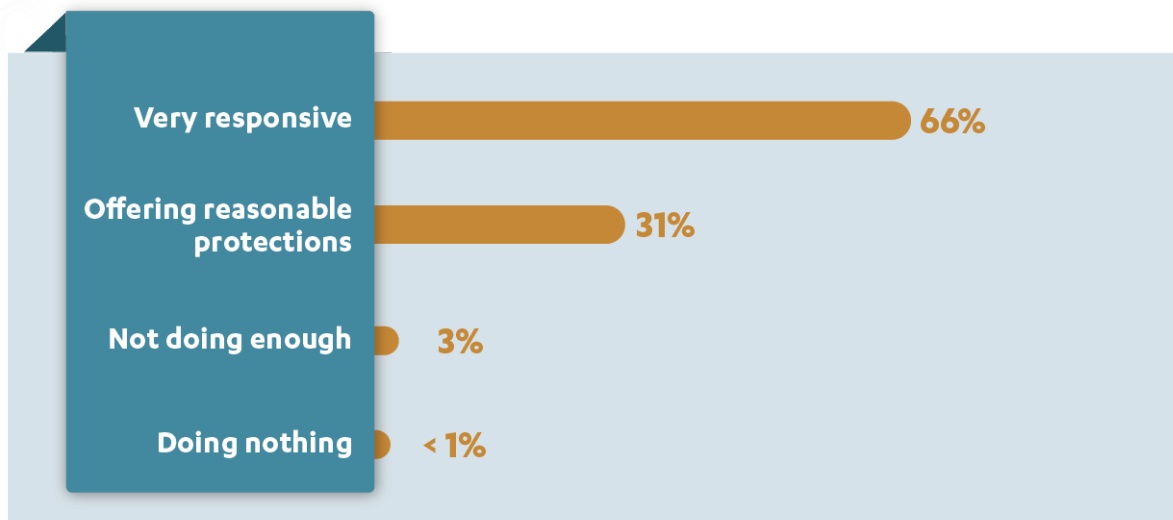
Yet as vaccinations became widespread and the state rolled back indoor mask mandates,<sup>33</sup> owners and workers were struggling to enforce mask usage for fear of turning away customers. For example, one owner said, “I am not asking customers to wear masks because I do not want to lose them. If my salon was crowded, I would ask customers to wear masks but not for now. There are only a few customers coming so I want to please them.”

Another worker observed that, “the owner will say nothing because the state removed masking restrictions.” When asked if she was scared of serving unmasked customers, she responded, “Yes, very much. The pandemic is still spreading in other areas so I will keep wearing masks.”

Anecdotal information also shows that the prevalence of PPE use has also decreased. Before restrictions were lifted, goggles and face shields were used more frequently. But now, most workers report only using masks and gloves.

Despite this, the majority of workers expressed that their employer offered reasonable protections and were very responsive to offering COVID-19 protections.

**Figure 32: Employer Doing Enough to Protect Workers from Exposure**



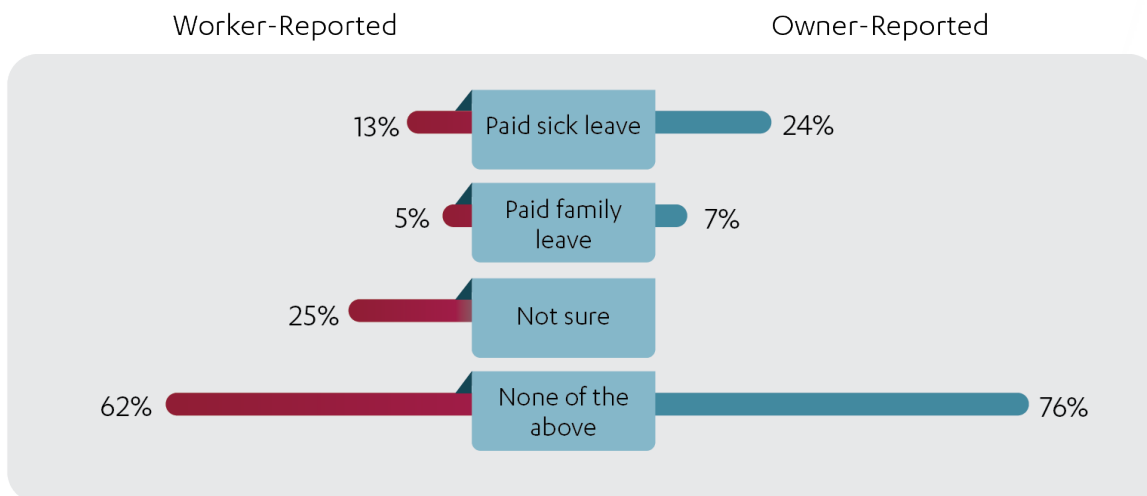
*Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021*

One of the workers interviewed offered more insight about how implementation of COVID-19 prevention measures has worked at their salon: “The salons where I am working, they are doing fine; we are doing all the protocols that we are supposed to do such as washing hands constantly, taking off used gloves, putting on new gloves, wearing masks, and being cautious of everything that we do.”

## Sick Leave

Even though workers have been working during the pandemic, very few reported having access to sick time. Research has shown that paid sick time has been an important tool to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 at workplaces.<sup>34</sup> And while California, along with many cities in the county, expanded access to paid sick leave, our survey suggests that workers in the industry have not been able to use it. Most (62%) reported that their employer does not offer paid sick leave or paid family leave, and one-quarter are not sure if their workplace offers these benefits. Only 18% are offered paid sick leave or family leave. Among owners, only one-quarter reported providing paid sick leave and 7% provided paid family leave. Notably, three-quarters did not offer any of these protections to their workers.

**Figure 33: Paid Sick Leave and Paid Family Leave**



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

Many owners in our survey said they were unable to afford paid leave benefits to their workers. One owner in our survey lamented that they had a “lack of financial resources to cover them.” Further, another observed that, “because there are not enough customers, there is no income,” and so they are unable to provide workers with these benefits.

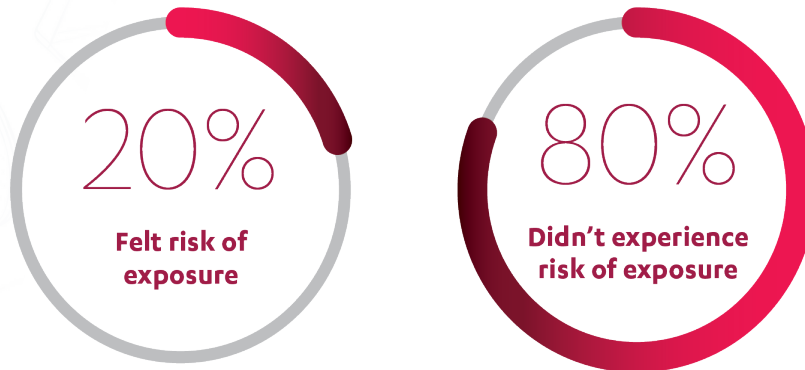
As such, many workers have to face the difficult choice of returning to work, despite the increased risk of exposure, or risk economic insecurity by staying home. One long-term nail salon worker shared, “Even though I want to work, my health is not good. I am getting hurt in my arms, legs, and all over my body. Also, it is dangerous to go around during this pandemic, I am going to retire. On the other hand, without a job, I could not support myself or my family. I am sad whenever I think about that.”



## Worker and Owner Concerns

Nail salon workers felt that they were at risk of being exposed to COVID-19 while working at the nail salons.

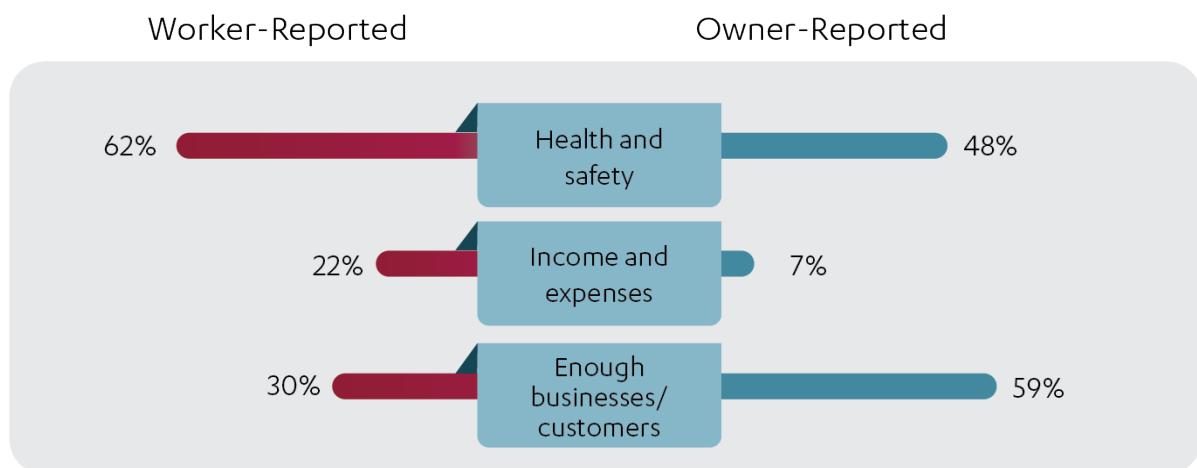
Figure 34: Worker Perceptions on Exposure Risk to COVID-19 at Work



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021

Many workers were worried about getting infected because they work in such close proximity to customers and each other. Others reported feeling at risk when customers coughed or sneezed while at the salon. One worker in our survey commented that, "With COVID-19 spreading, we never know who has it. I follow the guidelines the best I can with a mask, gloves and taking customers' temperature, but I am concerned." Workers also expressed that aside from worrying about getting sick themselves, they were also concerned about infecting coworkers and customers.

Figure 35: Worker and Owner Concerns Since Reopening



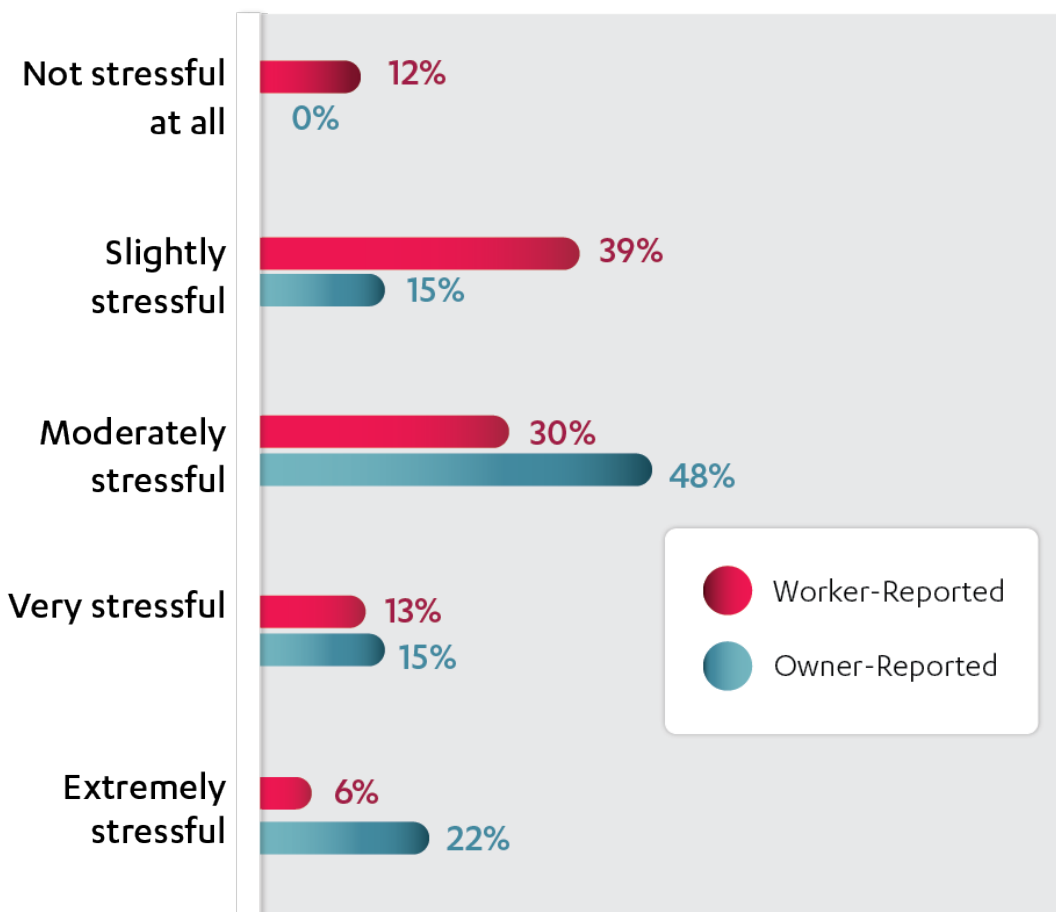
Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

One worker from our survey shared, “I worry about COVID-19, but can’t quit because I need money to pay bills, rent.” One owner, worried that new outbreaks could lead to additional closures of non-essential businesses, commented that “My main concern is closing down my salon again. I don’t think I could afford to pay rent if I had to shut down my salon again.”

Another said they “worry about money, pay rent and workers.” Others shared that business was “very slow, two-to-three customers each day,” and another observed that there are “not enough customers to have jobs for employees.” Some owners and workers alike were also concerned about the increase in anti-Asian racism.

When asked to rate their stress level while working at the salon during the week before the survey, half of the workers reported feeling moderately-to-extremely stressed, as compared to the 85% stress level of owners. Nearly 1-in-4 owners identified feeling extremely stressed.

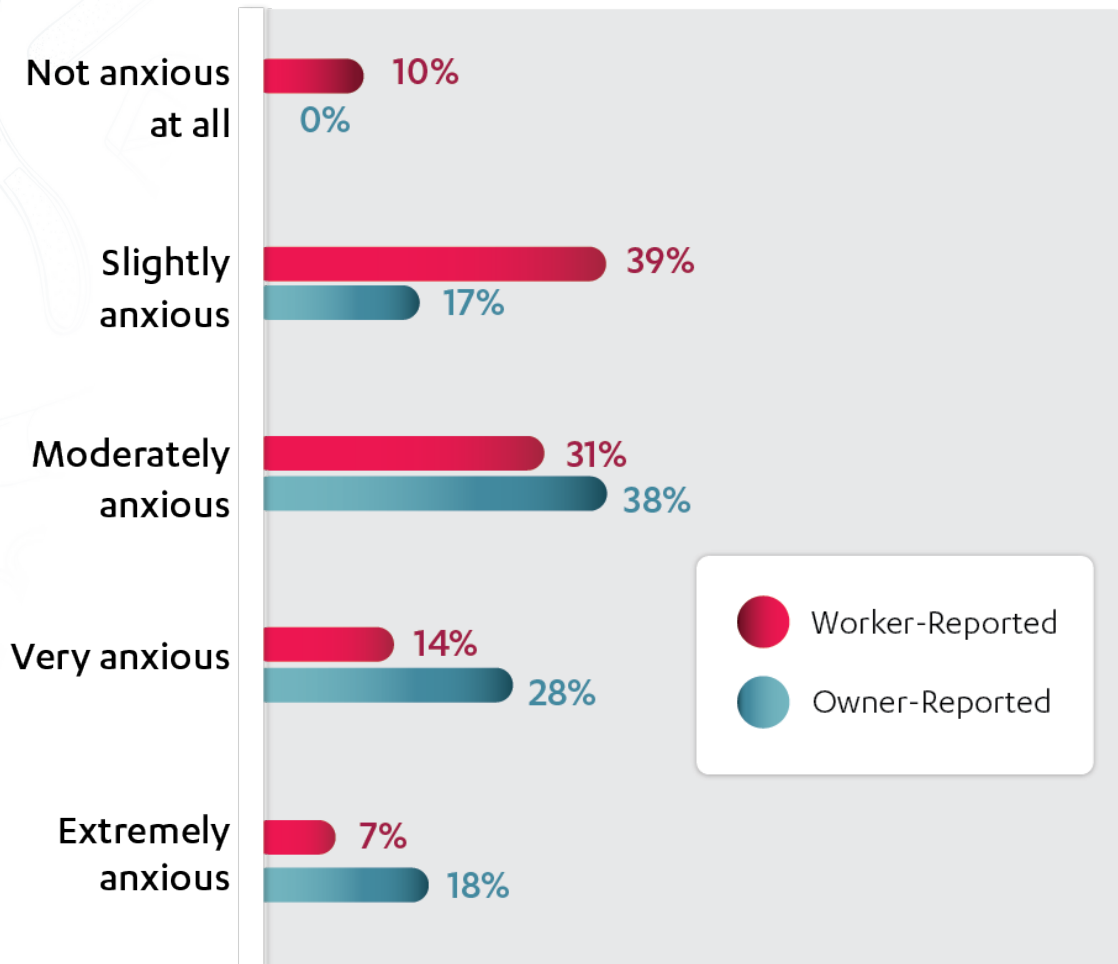
Figure 36: Stress Levels Among Nail Salon Workers and Owners



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

When asked about their anxiety levels since reopening; over half of workers reported feeling moderately to extremely anxious compared to 84% of the workers. Over one-third of owners suggested feeling very or extremely anxious since reopening.

Figure 37: Anxiety Levels Since Reopening Among Nail Salon Workers and Owners



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021



## 4. Supporting Workers and Owners

COVID-19 has affected nail salon workers and owners economically and emotionally with greater income and job loss, food insecurity, significantly high levels of stress and anxiety, and fewer resources and support. This section explores their support needs of workers and owners during the pandemic, and how they have come together since reopening to address some of the most pressing workplace safety concerns.

### Support Needs

Even though most workers said that they had received information on COVID-19, they would still like to learn more. While two-thirds wanted additional information about COVID-19's impact on the salon industry, more than half would like to know how best to protect themselves and their clients in the workplace, and another 40% want information on workplace modifications, labor laws, and regulations made openly accessible. Owners were also interested in information about small business loans and grant applications. Workers and owners also indicated that they would like more information on strategies to address anti-Asian racism and de-escalate racial tension.

Table 7: Information Needs

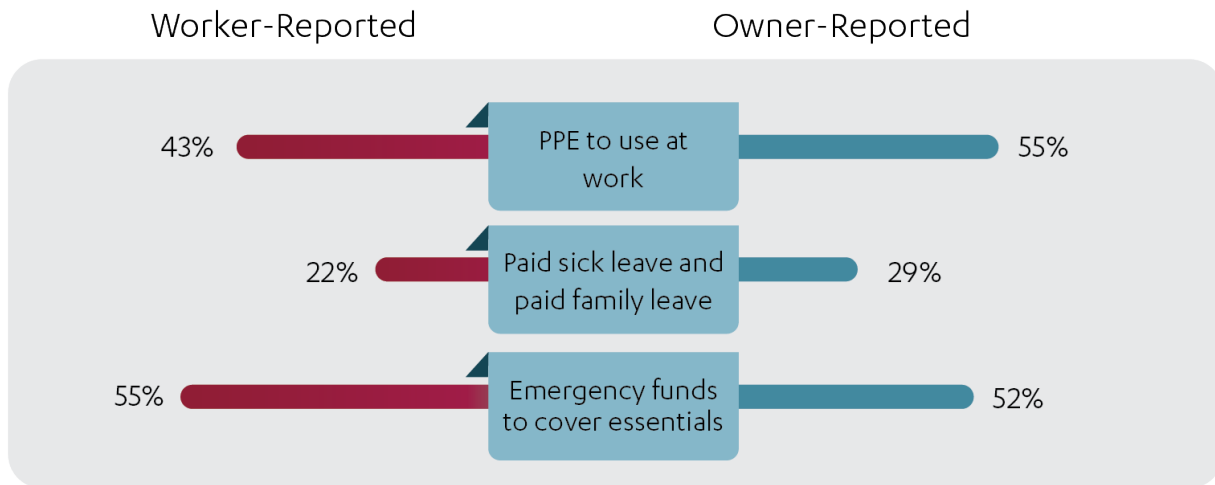
	Worker-Reported	Owner-Reported
<b>COVID-19's impact on salon industry</b>	69%	72%
<b>How to protect self and clients at work</b>	53%	74%
<b>Information to share with employer on workplace modifications to protect against COVID-19</b>	38%	-
<b>Information on small business loans and grants applications</b>	-	72%
<b>Labor laws and regulations during COVID-19</b>	40%	59%
<b>Addressing Anti-Asian racism and de-escalating racial tension</b>	31%	49%
<b>Information on residential (worker)/commercial (owners) rent forgiveness</b>	23%	56%

Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

Further, a large portion of workers and owners reported needing help accessing emergency funds to help cover bills, food, etc. Some indicated that they would like assistance for benefits, such as paid sick leave and paid family leave. And 43% of workers and 55% of owners indicated that they need PPE to protect themselves at work. During our interviews, owners and workers alike lamented having to purchase PPE out-of-pocket, as many were already struggling to cover basic living costs given their decline in business and earnings.

One owner observed that, “After the pandemic, we have to spend more on protection supplies to meet the safety standards while having no customers. I am afraid that I have to close my salon because I do not have enough income to pay rent.”

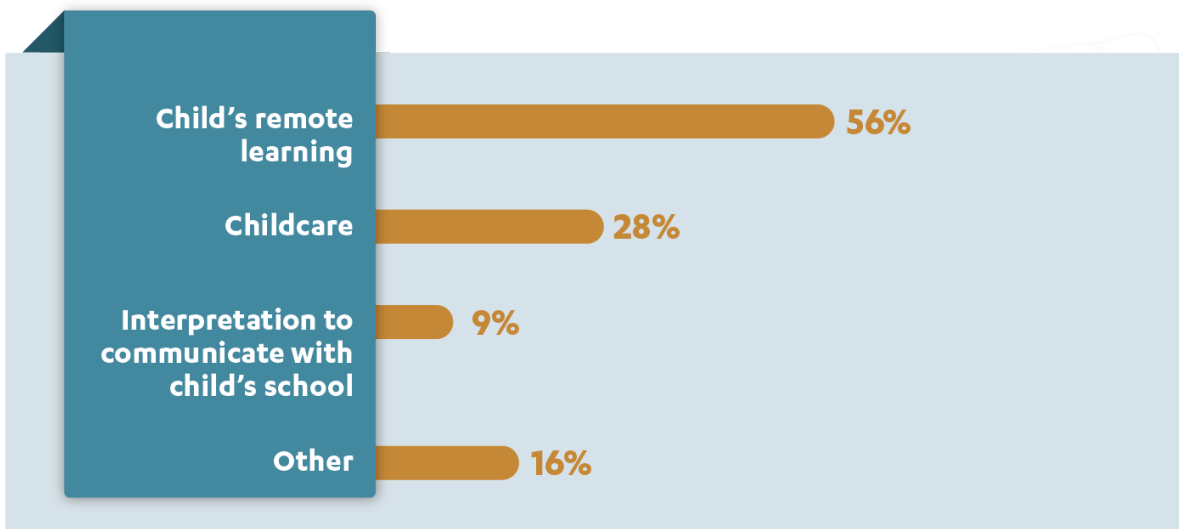
Figure 38: Need Help Accessing Resources



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021

More than half (55%) of workers surveyed had school-aged children in their household. Of these, 56% needed additional support with their child's online learning, 28% needed support with childcare, and 9% needed interpretation to communicate with the child's school.

Figure 39: Child Support for Working Parents



Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker Survey 2021



It is difficult to overstate the degree to which language access to clearly understand materials and available resources—such as childcare—was one of the presiding themes from our surveys and interviews with workers and owners. Navigating the often convoluted aid application process and being able to digest COVID-19 related information has been absolutely critical in this moment. One former owner we interviewed insisted that, “I think our community should ask for a Vietnamese version (of COVID-19 related aid). We have to raise our voices.”

## Coming Together

COVID-19 has upended so many aspects of people’s personal work and lives. But it also opened up rare opportunities for mutual aid and collective powerbuilding. Almost uniquely, both workers and owners report that staff came together in their salon to talk about workplace concerns and ideas for health and safety.

**Figure 40: Coming Together in the Workplace**



*Source: Nail Salon COVID-19 Worker and Owner Survey 2021*

Worker meetings covered a range of subjects, but some reported that they met only seldomly. Most indicated that the meetings were helpful to discuss important information and foster worker organizing. Meeting topics included health and safety, CDC recommendations, cleaning/sanitizing protocols, decreased business flow, handwashing, social distance, mask guidelines.

One worker in our survey said, “This meeting is very helpful because it is related to the health and safety of the owner and the customer.” Another commented, “We usually have staff meetings every other Friday about safety for employees and customers as well as how to provide better services and a safer working environment.”



## Recommendations

COVID-19 continues to devastate the nail salon industry as they navigate into the second year of the pandemic. In addition to physical, emotional, and mental strain experienced by low-wage immigrant and refugee workers and small business owners, they bear the heavy brunt of the nail industry's economic losses. The pandemic and anti-Asian racism are highlighting long-standing issues in the low-wage nail salon industry, and this moment presents an important opportunity to reshape the industry as one that provides safe and quality jobs for workers. COVID-19 health and safety practices must be maintained to protect workers and consumers and to prevent the ongoing spread of the virus. We must strive towards economic security and upward mobility for low wage workers by researching, advocating, and organizing for just responses to ongoing inequalities around pay/wages and benefits. Reopening and recovery requires a commitment to providing resources and support to build a more equitable industry. The following are recommendations to ensure that the nail salon industry can effectively recover while strengthening health, safety, and workers rights:



## **1. Provide accessible industry COVID-19 updates, guidelines, and support for the nail salon community.**

- Require that the California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology and local municipalities provide in-language technical assistance and support to nail salons.
- Fund in-language social and ethnic media communications outreach to provide culturally accessible and timely information to the nail salon workforce.
- Partner with, and resource, trusted community organizations on the ground to provide education and training.
- Provide personal protective equipment, including N95 masks and nitrile gloves, at a wholesale or free cost for nail salon employers to provide to their staff.
- Provide free and easy access for regular COVID-19 testing.



## **2. Provide support to nail salon workers and employers who are not only at risk physically, but also had the fabric of their wider lives unravel to the spread of COVID-19.**

- Expand access to in-language, culturally-competent mental health services for low income monolingual immigrants and refugees through free-or-low cost community-based programs.
- Reinstate anti-eviction and rent moratoriums or support for people who are still unable to pay for rent due to reduced working hours or who are unable to return to work.
- Provide commercial rent support for small business owners who have yet to make back the revenue lost due to COVID-19.
- Create a public health and gender-based approach to counter anti-Asian xenophobia, stereotyping, discrimination, and violence in public spaces, including small businesses or industries that are Asian-dominated and in Asian ethnic enclaves.



### 3. Ensure that strong worker protections are in place as the nail salon industry recovers from COVID-19.

- Maintain exclusion pay which ensures that employers pay employees during quarantine periods.
- Protect workers from retaliation when they ask to use sick time.
- Support low wage worker industries such as nail salons to create Public Health Councils, composed of workers who conduct peer-to-peer education with their co-workers and work to increase COVID-19 health and safety compliance at their worksites.
- Reinforce workplace labor laws and COVID-19 health and safety practices to remind nail salon employers of their responsibilities and to remind workers of their rights.
- Highlight and incentivize employers who are following COVID-19 protections and all labor and employment laws, including the Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards.
- Expand all Cal/OSHA protections to all workers regardless of worker classification.
- Provide more resources and staffing to Cal/OSHA to fully enforce workplace labor laws during COVID-19 and beyond. And enforcement that rightfully includes timely in-person follow-up rather than simply sending a letter, which is current OSHA policy.



### 4. Conduct ongoing research on the nail salon industry in order to have current data during the varying phases of the pandemic and as the industry emerges and evolves.

- Research the impact of COVID-19 on the nail salon community, including demographic and economic shifts.
- Collect data on the changing demographics within the industry.
- Research and recommend industry-wide policy models that can be adapted to benefit the nail salon sector.





## Appendix

### Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design including quantitative survey data, qualitative interviews, and an extensive literature review.

From December 2020 to May 2021, the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative (CHNSC) and the UCLA Labor Center conducted online and phone surveys of 158 nail salon workers and 42 nail salon owners in California. To qualify for this survey, owner participants had to own a nail salon that was open for business at the time of the survey. Similarly, manicurists had to be working at a nail salon at the time of the survey.

Surveys were conducted in English and Vietnamese and each took approximately 16 minutes to complete. Participants were recruited through the CHNSC’s existing contact lists as well as nail salons listed with the Healthy Nail Salon Recognition Program in five cities and counties (Alameda, Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Monica). Survey participants were also recruited through word of mouth. A \$40 incentive was provided to workers and owners who completed the survey.

Both worker and owner surveys included questions about COVID-19 economic impacts, business reopening experiences, COVID-19 health and safety practices, anti-Asian discrimination, and community needs.

In addition, CHNSC recruited and interviewed 4 workers and 2 owners about their experience of the salon closures. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and each received an additional \$40 incentive. These interviews were 20-30 minutes long and conducted via telephone or video conferencing software.

**Table A1: Workers’ and Owners’ Selected Characteristics**

<b>Characteristic</b>		<b>Worker</b>	<b>Owner</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>18–24</b>	2%	-
	<b>25–34</b>	14%	-
	<b>35–44</b>	32%	-
	<b>45–54</b>	32%	-
	<b>55–64</b>	16%	-
	<b>65 or older</b>	4%	-

		<b>Worker</b>	<b>Owner</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	88%	59%
	<b>Male</b>	8%	28%
	<b>Gender non-conforming</b>	4%	13%



Table A2: Nail Salon Locations

<b>Characteristic County</b>	<b>Worker</b>	<b>Owner</b>
<b>Alameda</b>	18%	10%
<b>Los Angeles</b>	3%	10%
<b>Marin</b>	1%	5%
<b>Orange</b>	-	8%
<b>Riverside</b>	4%	-
<b>San Francisco</b>	21%	35%
<b>San Mateo</b>	8%	10%
<b>Santa Clara</b>	33%	13%

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