

INFORMAL CAREGIVING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS IN THE U.S.



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MANY
THANKS
TO

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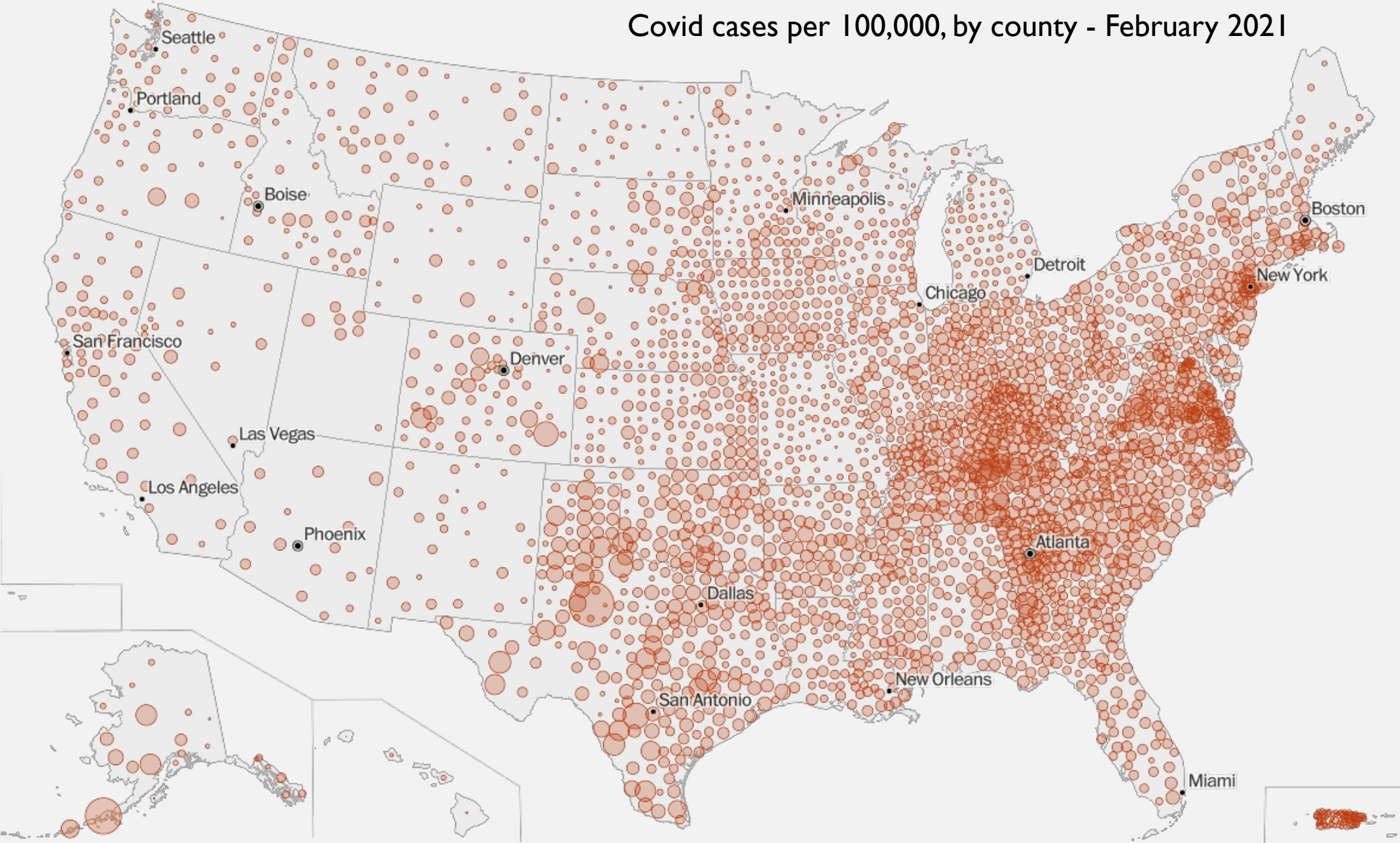
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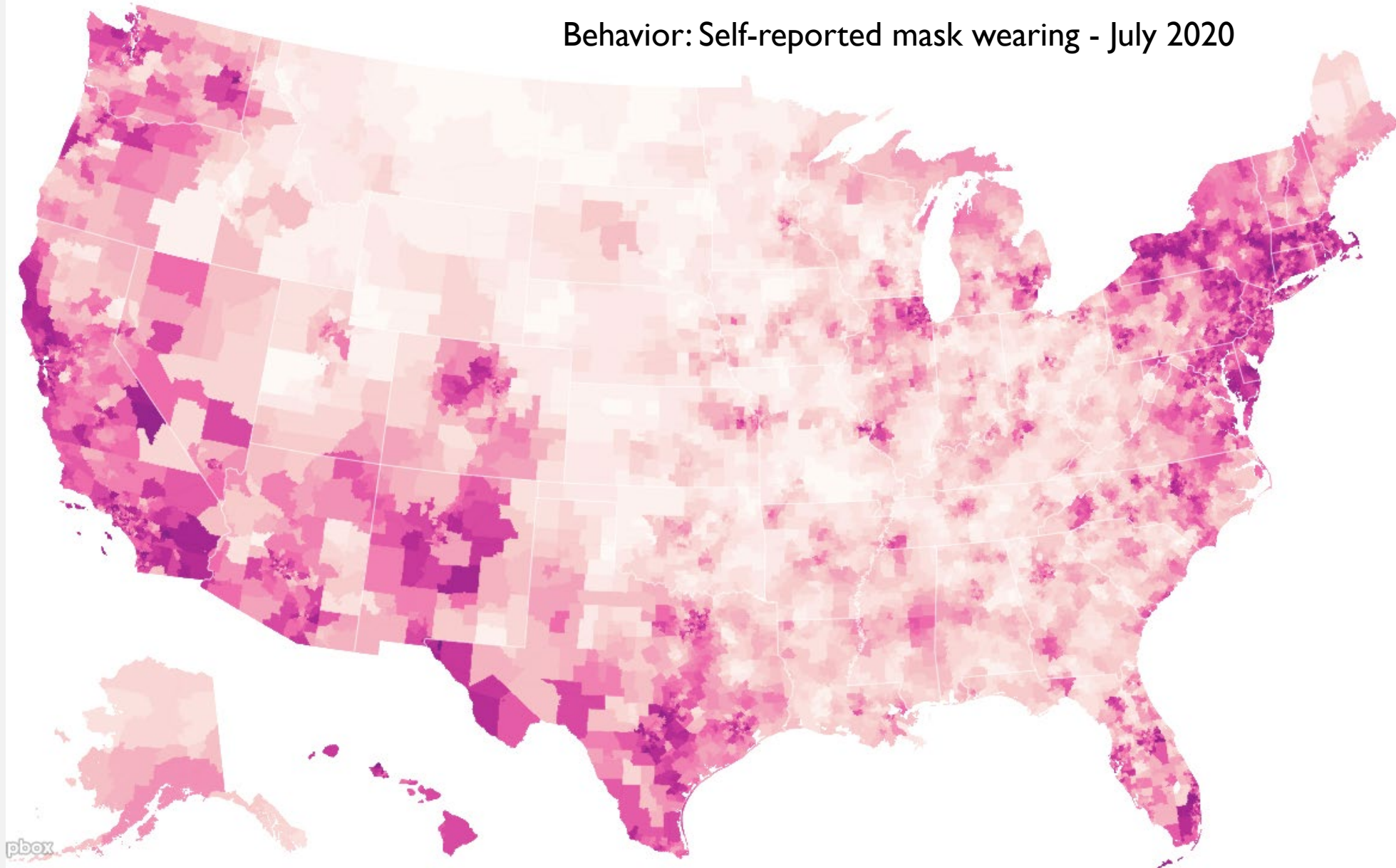
Alexandria Tomkunas

Covid cases per 100,000, by county - February 2021



The New York Times

Behavior: Self-reported mask wearing - July 2020

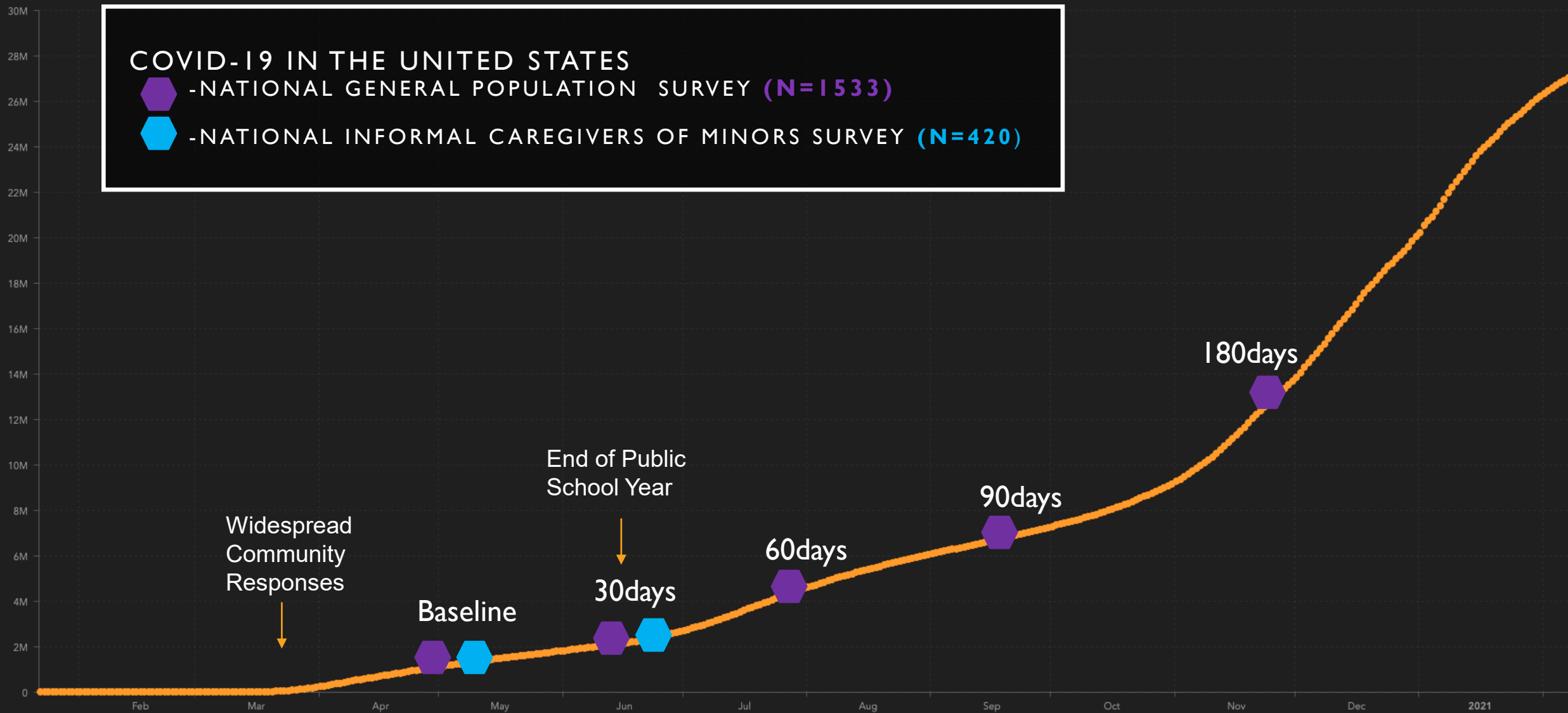




COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES

 -NATIONAL GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY (N=1533)

 -NATIONAL INFORMAL CAREGIVERS OF MINORS SURVEY (N=420)





STUDY I:

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

PARK ET AL., 2020

- U.S. mental health experiences April – November 2020 (N=1533)
 - Survey administered through MTurk online worker population
 - Covid-related stressors: fears of infection, disruptions to daily routines, and lack of reliable information/resources.
- Results from an **early cut of the baseline data** (n = 1050; 54% female, mean age = 38.9 years) indicated *significant group differences for those caring for minors* during the pandemic
 - High ambiguity & limited opportunities for control
 - Attempts to cope with distress symptoms → psychiatric dx
 - Anxiety & post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
 - 1. **Infection-related stress appraisal**
 - Fear of infection (self/loved ones)/ Self-monitoring symptoms
 - Stigma, shame, discrimination resulting from group membership
 - 2. **Activity Disruption stress appraisal**
 - Personal care disruptions
 - 3. **Small but significant coping differences** (Cohen's *ds* from .18 - .21)



STUDY I:

SUB-GROUP COMPARISONS

LONGITUDINAL RESULTS

RUSSELL ET AL., UNDER REVIEW

- Caregivers of minors (n = 176, 63.6% female; mean age = 33.5 years) report concerning levels of distress:
 - ~20% scored **above the clinical cutoff** for PTSD at 60 days
 - 66% (n=23) of whom were female.
 - Significantly higher rates of COVID-specific stressors (ts ranging -5.54 to -3.36, $p < .01$)
 - Concerning patterns of coping strategies: More substance use and behavioral disengagement, and less active coping (ts ranging from -2.86 to -4.38, $p < .01$).
- Linear stepwise regressions modeled psychological distress on resilience factors, coping, and emotion regulation:
 - Increased anxiety symptoms at baseline was a **consistent predictor of psychological distress 60 days later**
 - No consistent patterns for depression symptoms, socioeconomic indicators like partner status or income

STUDY 2

FAMILY CAREGIVING EXPERIENCE (N=420):

IMPACT OF CAREGIVING BURDEN ON RELATIONSHIP QUALITIES

RUSSELL ET AL., 2020

Generally, we asked:

Are caregivers regulating caregiving burdens in ways that shape the relationships with their children?

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Child-Parent Conflict	--					
Child-Parent Closeness	-.37**	--				
Anxiety	.56**	-.17**	--			
Depression	.72**	-.27**	.88**	--		
Perceived Child Stress	.75**	-.47**	.57**	.67**	--	
Caregiver Burden	.58**	-.31**	.53**	.62**	.55**	--

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

M(SD) &
Group
Differences

Variable	M (SD)	Group Differences (effect size)
Child-Parent Conflict	19.43 (8.44)	Higher for men than women (d = 0.39) Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.41) Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.59)
Child-Parent Closeness	29.66 (4.56)	Higher for women than men (d = 0.48) Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are met (d = 0.29)
Generalized Anxiety	7.59 (6.01)	Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.40) Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.38)
Depression	19.16 (17.06)	Higher for men than women (d = 0.27) Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.48) Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.33)
Perceived Child Stress	23.79 (6.88)	Higher for men than women (d = 0.47) Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.40) Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.39)
Caregiver Burden	11.00 (8.03)	Higher for men than women (d = 0.20) Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.53)

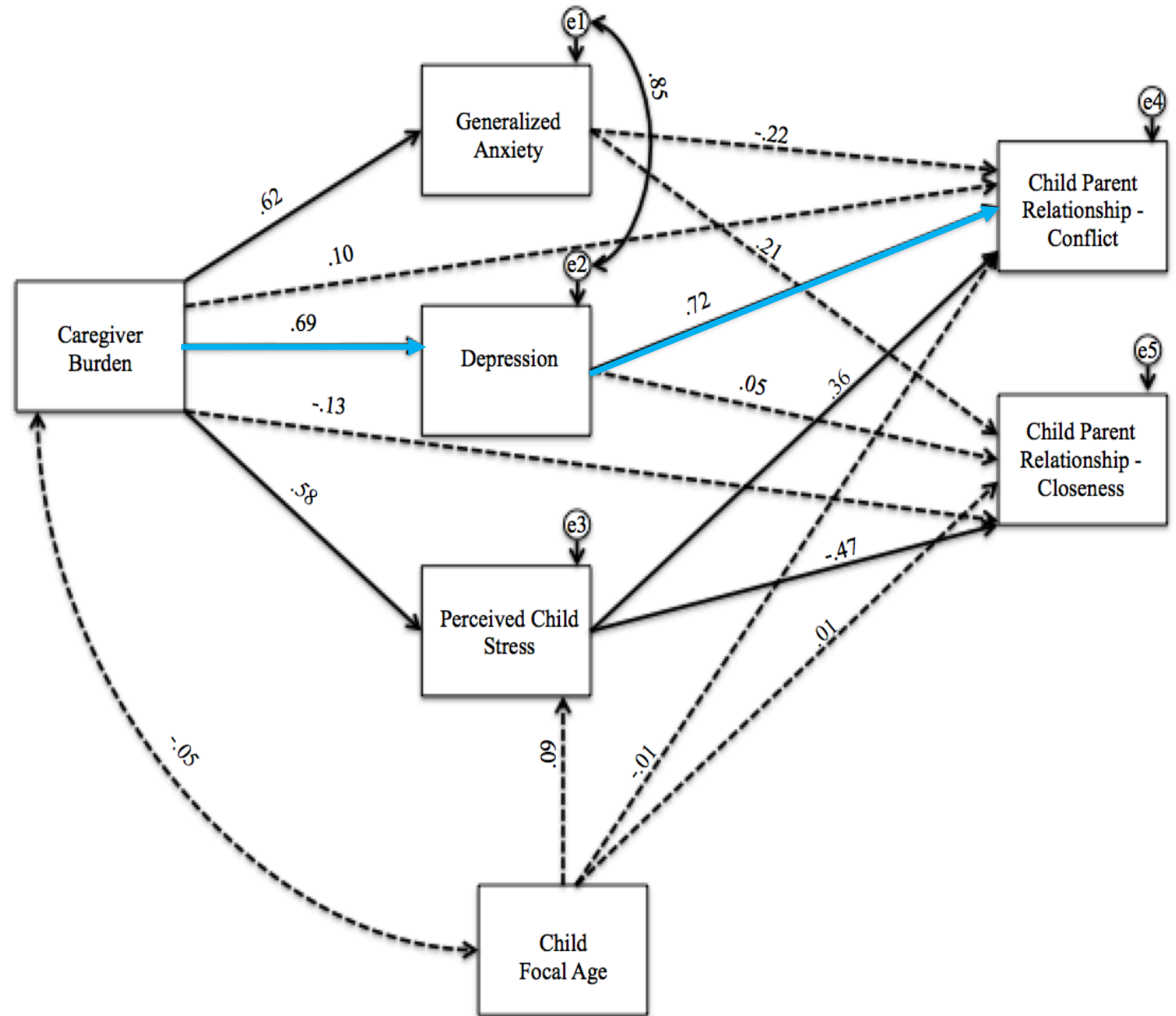
MULTIGROUP PATH MODELING

MALE (N=221)
CAREGIVERS'
BURDEN

STANDARDIZED
PATH ESTIMATES

Overall model had acceptable fit:
 $\chi^2(10) = 159.04, p < 0.01$
CFI = .91, GFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.18.

- Linkages are consistently higher here than for women
- In contrast to the model for women, this model indicates a **significant linkage from increased depression to conflict** with their children



DISCUSSION

- Caregivers are experiencing high levels of distress over short periods of time (60 days)
 - PTSD symptoms are concerning, especially for women who report a disproportionate level of caregiving responsibility and greater caregiver burden than their male counterparts in the US
- Caregiver burden directly predicts parents' mental health (anxiety and depression symptomology) and parents' perceptions of child stress
 - While there were no direct effects between burden and child parent relationship qualities (conflict and closeness), caregiver burden indirectly predicted child parent relationship qualities through parents' mental health and perceived child stress.
 - There is evidence of spill-over effects across family subsystems: from caregivers' perceived stress to perceptions of child's stress
- Limitations: Lack of pre-pandemic data; relatively small cell group sizes constrains subgroup tests by child characteristics
 - Known examples of differential effects include: Chronic health, age, and disability status
- Given the effects of high ambiguity and limited opportunities for control on caregiver outcomes, follow-up mental health assessments are warranted, as are consistent Covid responses.
 - Employment, school, childcare, and other community resource disruptions

THANK YOU!

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