

Study on Food Insecurity in United States and Australia

With support from The Charley Eisele Family Foundation, researchers from Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition in Omaha, Nebraska, United States and Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia compared and contrasted the experience of food insecurity among parents of young children (ages 0-5) and pregnant women in both countries and to develop a comprehensive household food security tool. Historically, food security has been addressed by countries individually, with limited cross-country collaboration. The current work funded by the Charley Eisele Family Foundation is groundbreaking in fostering a spirit of shared learning and disseminating “what works” to address food security across the globe, it is important for researchers and practitioners alike to widen their view and collaborate across borders and sectors.



The Need

Food Insecurity Statistics Among Both Countries



14.3 million adults & children
(11.1% of population)
in the United States



3.4 million adults & children
(13.5% of population)
in Australia



Both countries have inconsistent and limited assessment of food insecurity and related factors that low-income families experience, which hampers effective programmatic and policy responses.

Of particular concern is the impact of food insecurity on young children (ages 0-6 years old):



Infants have greater odds of having poor health, being nutrient deficient, experiencing developmental challenges, and being hospitalized



Pregnant women may have increased risk of greater weight gain, disordered eating, chronic disease, and pregnancy complications



This Project



Literature review

Identify factors associated with food insecurity among pregnant women and households with young children ages 0-6 years



43 Semi-structured interviews

with pregnant women or households with young children ages 0-6 experiencing or at risk of food insecurity in Omaha and Melbourne



Survey tool development

Developed a comprehensive survey tool to assess unique constructs related to food insecurity among pregnant women or households with young children ages 0-6.

Cognitive interviews (n=9) to improve the survey and tested among a pilot sample of 1,000 individuals



“The Deakin team has found the Gretchen Swanson Center staff to be genuinely dedicated, experienced scientists who conduct real-world impactful nutrition research – so this ‘human capital’ is deeply valuable. The project will allow both groups, and countries, to learn from one another and produce quality research relevant to high-income nations like the USA and Australia. This partnership has sparked a fruitful collaboration that we see carrying forward for years to come, continuing to develop shared learnings on food insecurity in high income countries.”





-Rebecca Lindberg,
Deakin University



Findings

Families' that have young children (or pregnant women) reported some similarities and differences in their experience of food insecurity between the United States and Australia.

Many interviewees in both countries described similar strategies to put food on their tables:

-  Utilization of federal food assistance programs and/or food pantries
-  Budgeting and food preparation skills that help stretch their food dollar
-  Balancing competing expenses (i.e., paying utilities vs buying food)
-  Receiving help from family and friends

Some of the common challenges that were also highlighted: transportation to preferred food outlets, meeting specific dietary needs of their children (e.g., feeding teenagers and young children), job loss and economic duress, and managing stress and mental health.

COVID-19 Pandemic

created natural experiment to explore difference between US and AUS because programs, rules/policies, and norms played out in unique ways in each country

Findings underscore the need to have comprehensive measures of food security that assess nuanced aspects among an understudied and underserved population (parents of young children, pregnant people)

Both countries had some form of stimulus money to help families make ends meet, but support infrastructures differ.

United States



Food specific federal food assistance programs (SNAP, WIC)



More developed and robust emergency food system (food banks and pantries are well funded and coordinated)



Less restrictive lockdowns allowed for easier access to food outlets, but parents struggled with challenges of managing their children's school work at home with their own employment, while schools were shut down

Australia

General welfare programs provide financial support for low-income families.

Emergency food is handled more by grassroots organizations

More restrictive lockdowns limited food access, especially for low-income families (e.g., not traveling outside of a 5 km radius from their home means no "deal shopping" and higher food prices)

"Right now when the kids, we're not even going to date for school I had, you know, they're home more and especially because when this started, you know, how to work at home when COVID started. And it's more expensive for me because now I have to give them breakfast. I have to give them lunch. And when we're only used to making dinner Monday through Friday, and that triple as much as what the cost of what I already have to do."

-United States Interviewee

"I was very stressed out because we have to pay our mortgage, plus we have a loan to pay for our car. My husband is on JobKeeper [AUS COVID response unemployment] as well so we were actually a bit worried if they stop JobKeeper, there will be no income for us at all. So I was actually stressed out, and I've applied for the job, and I've got the job, and into just one week of training they made me redundant again. Unfortunately they had COVID cases, so they took them off work and made me redundant. So that was the second time."

-Australia Interviewee



Project Deliverables



Survey:

Comprehensive household food security tool for families with young children and/or pregnant women



Presentation at 2021 International Meeting (ISBNPA):

Qualitative Exploration of Factors Influencing Food Insecurity Among Low-income Parents of Children 0-6 years in Two High-Income Countries.



Five Publications:

Lindberg, R., Parks, C.A., Bastian, A., McKay, F., van der Pligt, P., McNaughton, S. Yaroch, A.L.. Factors associated with food insecurity among pregnant women and caregivers of children aged 0-6 years in high-income countries: An international scoping review. *Maternal Child Health*.

Bastian, A., Lindberg, R., Parks, C.A., McKay, F., Stern, K., van der Pligt, P., Yaroch, A.L.. In Preparation. Development of a comprehensive household food security tool for families with young children and/or pregnant women.

Parks, C.A., Bastian, A., McKay, F., Stern, K., van der Pligt, P., Lindberg, R., Yaroch, A.L.. Under Review. Food insecurity among parents of young children in the United States and Australia: focusing on etiology and outcomes. *Public Health Nutrition*

Lindberg, R., Parks, C.A., Bastian, A., McKay, F., van der Pligt, P., McNaughton, S. Yaroch, A.L. (In Preparation). The lived experience of food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic in a sample of urban-dwelling mothers living in Omaha, USA and Melbourne, Australia. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

Parks, C.A., Lindberg, R., Bastian, A., McKay, F., van der Pligt, P., Yaroch, A.L. (In Preparation). Food insecurity experiences of parents of young children in two high income countries. *Appetite*.