

Agricultural Production and Food Systems

P001 A Qualitative Study to Compare Food-Insecure College Students' Eating Behaviors With and Without Access to a Campus Food Pantry

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Background: Food-insecure college students have an increased likelihood of developing disordered eating behaviors, possibly due to coping behaviors including restriction when food is scarce and bingeing when food is abundant. While more and more universities are adding on-campus food pantries, it is unclear how access to on-campus food pantries impacts eating behaviors and food insecurity.

Objective: To explore how the cycle of food abundance and scarcity impacts food-insecure college students' eating behaviors and how access to a campus food pantry impacts this cycle.

Study Design, Settings, and Participants: Food-insecure, undergraduate students (n=40) from institutions around Illinois with food pantries (n=20) and without food pantries (n=20) who met inclusion criteria completed one-on-one semi-structured interviews via Zoom.

Outcome Measures and Analysis: Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Investigators performed content analysis to identify and compare themes among participants with and without access to a campus food pantry.

Results: Students with and without access to a campus food pantry discussed similar experiences, including experiencing periods of food abundance and scarcity, and using a variety of food-related behaviors to cope with their food situation. Some students attending institutions with an on-campus food pantry were unaware that a pantry existed. Students from both types of institutions reported that although they did not use one, an on-campus pantry has the potential to increase food availability and improve eating habits; however, regardless if a pantry was on campus, students reported that shame and embarrassment would prevent them from using university resources.

Conclusions: Food-insecure college students may exhibit disordered eating behaviors, including restriction and binge eating, to cope with their food situation. Furthermore, the existence of a campus food pantry alone is insufficient for addressing college food insecurity and the corresponding disordered eating behaviors.

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P002 Access to Fresh Produce and Low-Fat Food Products in SNAP-Eligible Virginians During COVID-19

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Background: Consuming fresh produce and low-fat food products is desirable to maintain a healthy diet. Restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in disruptions in the food supply and difficulties in access to fresh produce and low-fat products.

Objective: To assess food access to fresh produce and low-fat products among SNAP-eligible Virginians during COVID-19.

Study Design, Setting, Participants: An online Qualtrics cross-sectional survey was conducted with SNAP-eligible Virginians aged 18 and older in November-December 2020.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Survey questions included socio-demographic information and questions about access to, and quality of, fresh produce and low-fat products within the respondents' neighborhoods. Descriptive statistics were computed in SPSS.

Results: Of 973 survey responses, 228 (23.4%) respondents reported difficulties accessing fresh produce; 215 (22.1%) difficulty accessing fresh produce of high quality; and 233 (23.9%) issues with breadth of produce selection. By contrast, 184 (19.0%) respondents reported difficulty accessing low-fat products and 184 respondents (19.0%) reported issues with breadth of low-fat product selection. Severe difficulties in accessing both fresh produce and low-fat products were noted in Southwest and Eastern Virginia.

Conclusions: Overall, one-quarter of survey respondents reported challenges with accessing produce. While we did not assess changes because of COVID-19 specifically, efforts to support access to nutritious options is a critical component of promoting food security and community food security. These results can inform and tailor coordinated programs that include nutrition education programs and policy, systems, and environmental change initiatives. Follow-up research is warranted to determine ongoing challenges with food access among adults and households with lower incomes.

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