Prevalence of and Characteristics Associated with Food Security Status Among International College Students

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Background

- There are over 1.4 million international students studying in the US.1
- Internationals students may experience a variety of challenges as they transition to living and studying in a new country and institution.
- Food insecurity refers to a lack of consistent and dependable access to enough food to support an active and healthy life.2,3
- The majority of studies on food insecurity among US college students show higher prevalence rates than the general population.2,3
- Studies have found higher rates of food insecurity among international students compared with non-international students attending UNC Chapel Hill.4,5
- Past studies have examined characteristics associated with food security status among students, but have not looked specifically at characteristics associated with food security status among international students.3,4

Objective

To estimate the prevalence of and identify characteristics associated with food insecurity among international students at UNC Chapel Hill.

Methods

- This cross-sectional study used data from 263 international students attending UNC Chapel Hill who completed an online survey in October and November of 2016.
- Food security status was assessed using the 10-item US Adult Food Security Survey Module and students were categorized as having high food security, marginal food security, or food insecurity.
- Self-reported demographics and other student characteristics were assessed.
- Descriptive statistics were calculated. Monte Carlo Estimates for the Exact Test and ANOVA were used to assess statistical significance for the association between food security status and student characteristics.

Results

Table 1: Characteristics of International Students by Food Security Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Security Status</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Food Security (n=135)</td>
<td>24.4 (4.8)</td>
<td>23.9 (5.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Food Security (n=63)</td>
<td>21.7 (4.1)</td>
<td>20.9 (4.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Insecurity (n=65)</td>
<td>15.8 (4.1)</td>
<td>15.1 (4.0)</td>
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- Age
  - Years in US: 2.6 (1.3)
  - Gender: Female 54 (62) Males 51 (60)
  - Marital Status: Not Married 106 (79) Married 51 (63)
- Employment Status: Full-time 87 (64) Part-time 48 (36)
- Financial Aid: No 80 (59) Yes 85 (61)
- Perceived Health Rating: Excellent 56 (41) Good 71 (53) Fair 8 (6)
- Weight Status: Underweight 8 (6) Normal weight 93 (69) Overweight 23 (18)
- Cooking Frequency: Never 13 (10) Sometimes 39 (29) Often 83 (61)
- Perceived Cooking Skills: Poor 9 (7) Fair 28 (21) Excellent 38 (28)
- Meal Plan: No 108 (80) Yes 27 (20)

Conclusions

- Lack of food security is a serious issue among international students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with nearly half reporting food insecurity or marginal food security.
- The characteristics identified in this study as being associated with food security status can help to inform future research and interventions for addressing food security status among international students.

References


Funding Acknowledgement

This study was supported by a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Food for All micro-grant.

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