

Campus Food Insecurity and Pantry Awareness at a Public University in South Central Florida



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INTRODUCTION

- Higher education institutions have reported from 21 to 59% of their students experiencing food insecurity, meaning they lack the resources to be able to obtain enough food.
- Food insecurity can negatively impact students' academic performance, physical health, and mental health.
- Thus, many campuses have established on-site food pantries to address this issue.



Objective. To establish the prevalence of food insecurity among students at the University of South Florida-Tampa campus and their awareness and use of the campus food pantry

METHODS

Study Design, Setting, Participants

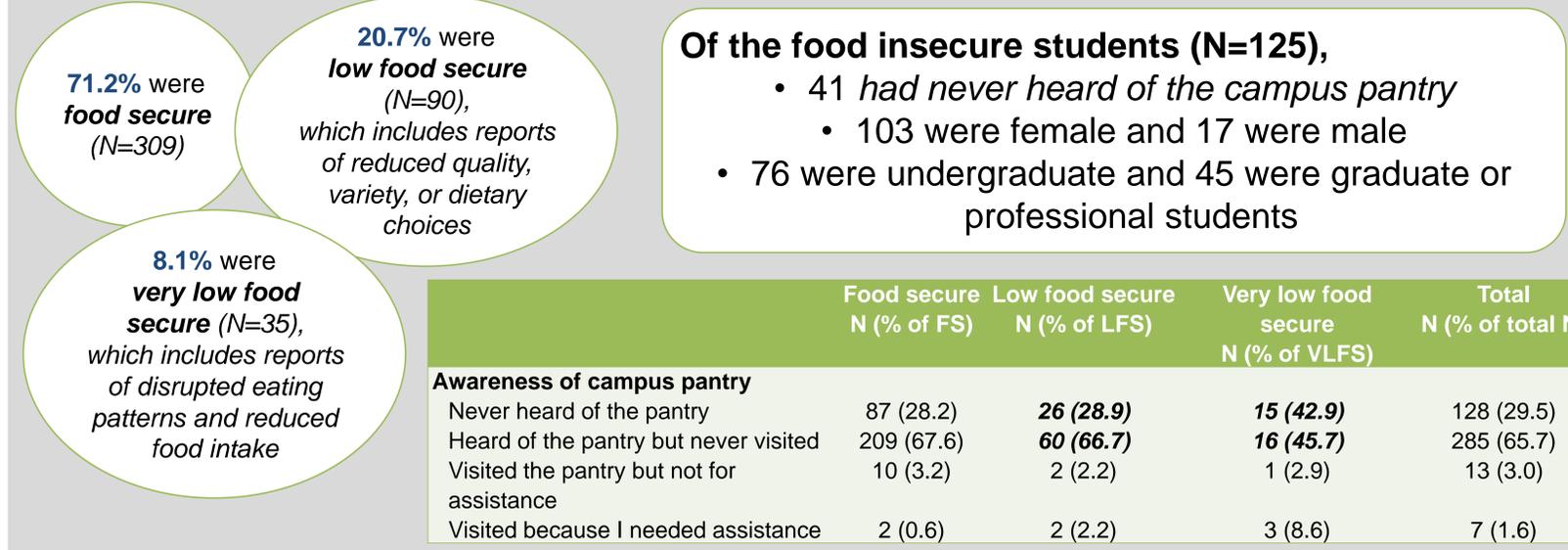
- An online, food systems survey was administered to students at the University of South Florida in Fall 2019; only pantry-related items are included in the analysis.
- A convenience sample of actively enrolled students across all academic colleges completed the survey via Qualtrics; recruitment ranged from in-person to online listservs and email/course announcements.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis

- Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.
- To determine food security status, only completed responses (N=434) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 6-item short form Food Security Survey Module were included; 63 responses excluded.
- Open-ended responses were coded and analyzed to identify salient themes.

RESULTS

- Of the 434 students, 331 (76.3%) were female, 79 (18.2%) were male, 8 (1.8%) preferred not to say, and 16 (3.7%) were other/unknown.
- The sample included diverse racial groups though primarily White: White (59.2%), Black (9.2%), Asian (15.9%), Multiracial (7.9%), and Other (7.8%); overall, 18.9% were Hispanic/Latino.



When asked if students would use the pantry if they needed, 38 students said they would NOT use it for various reasons including:

- Embarrassment**
 - "I'm too anxious and self conscious." –Female, third year; low food secure
 - "Embarrassing." –Female, third year; very low food secure
- Perception of foods provided**
 - "The food is canned and typically has preservatives and high sodium. It's more unhealthy to go there." –Female, second year; food secure
 - "It may not provide items that I need plus I'm not sure how it's prepared." –Female, third year; very low food secure
- Lack of awareness**
 - "It is difficult to find and I do not ever know when it is open." –Female, graduate or professional student; low food secure
 - "I do not know about it or know who can go to it." –Female, graduate or professional student; food secure
- Perception of the purpose**
 - "I am a graduate student and I'd feel that the pantry is more so aimed toward undergraduate students. Though, I also feel that I want undergrads to have preference...(?)" –Female, graduate or professional student; low food secure
 - "I do not feel I am entitled to access it because other students may need it more." –Female, graduate or professional student; food secure

Other Demographics

	Frequency N (%)
Academic Level	
Undergraduate	237 (54.6)
Graduate or professional	186 (42.9)
International Student	
Yes	33 (7.6)
No	389 (89.6)
Living on/off campus	
On campus	95 (21.9)
Off campus	328 (75.6)
Living with child	
Yes	23 (5.3)
No	387 (89.2)
Income	
Employment full-time	47 (10.8)
Employment part-time	96 (22.1)
Federal work study	18 (4.1)
Loans/financial aid	123 (28.3)
Financial support – significant other	16 (3.7)
Financial support – family	110 (25.3)
Other/unknown	29 (5.5)

DISCUSSION

- Of all 434 students, 29.5% had never heard of the pantry. Among food insecure students, almost one third (41 of 125) did not know about the pantry. Outreach to students should be prioritized to ensure that students are aware of these resources. Additionally, barriers of pantry use were captured through students' open responses. Campus pantries should consider approaches to overcome negative perceptions (e.g., stigma) and provide more education about the pantry and the foods provided.
- Limitations: Using the six item short form does not capture household food insecurity, i.e., for the 5.3% of the sample, it would not reflect their child's food security status.



Of 434 USF-Tampa students, 28.8% were identified as food insecure, meaning they do not have enough resources to maintain a healthy, active life.

