College Students Attending Online Programs have Lower Rates of Food Insecurity than Residental Students

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INTRODUCTION

• Food insecurity is “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways”.

• Among college students, the prevalence of food insecurity prevalence ranges from 14-59% which is higher than US national household average of 10.5% in 2019 and AL state average of 13.9% in 2017-2019.2,5

• Residential students living off campus report greater food insecurity than those living on campus.4,6

• Distance education programs are becoming popular and provide a way to continue one’s education from home.

• The food security status of students completing their programs online is unknown.

OBJECTIVE

To assess food security among college students by program type - residential or online.

METHODS

• Study sample comprised college students (≥18 years) from the University of Alabama, one of 22 US higher institutions that participated in the WISH4Campus food insecurity study in 2019.

• Students completed an online survey comprising the ten- item Adult Food Security Survey Module, questions on program status (residential or online program), financial status and demographics.

• Low and very low food secure students were classified as food insecure while food secure and marginally food secure students were classified as food secure.

• Binary logistic regression analysis was used to determine whether food security status and other demographic and financial factors differed by program type (p<0.05).

RESULTS

The prevalence of food insecurity among the residential students was significantly higher than students obtaining their degree online (44.2% versus 32.6%, OR=2.6, 95% CI=1.8, 3.9).

When compared to residential students, online students were more likely to be employed full-time (OR=7.7, 95% CI: 4.5,13.0) and less likely to receive financial aid (OR=0.5, 95% CI:0.4, 0.8) and family support (OR=0.6, 95% CI:0.4,0.9).

CONCLUSIONS

• The prevalence of food insecurity among students in this sample is twice as high as that of the state and nation.

• Students in an online program may be more food secure compared to residential students.

REFERENCES