

The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security Status and Food Access Among SNAP-Eligible Utahns

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BACKGROUND

COVID-19 resulted in compromised employment and food availability, both of which have the potential to adversely influence food security.¹⁻⁵ The National Food Access & COVID Research Team (NFACT) examined pandemic-related impacts on food access, food security, and food systems across 15 states in various populations.⁶

The objective of this research was to explore the effect of COVID-19 on food insecurity, specifically perceived food access challenges, barriers, and food access compensatory strategies among individuals eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Utah. **SNEB Competencies:** 1.5, 5.3, 5.4

METHODS

- **STUDY DESIGN & PARTICIPANTS:** A cross-sectional survey examining food-related challenges before and since the COVID-19 outbreak was disseminated to all SNAP-eligible individuals (those with a monthly income 130% below the federal poverty level) in Utah from July-September, 2020 ($N = 24,763$) via a Qualtrics survey.
- **INSTRUMENTATION:** A modified version of an NFACT-developed survey (to include nutrition education items) was employed (76 items), which included:
 - USDA food security module (6-item version) to determine food security status
 - 5 food access challenge items (each with a 4-level scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)
 - 6 barriers to nutrition program use items (each with a 4-level rating scale ranging from Never to Every time)
 - Likelihood for reliance on compensatory strategies to afford food (summed score range: 7-42; 7 items each with a 6-level rating scale ranging from Very Unlikely to Very Likely; 1 point assigned to each level in the rating scale; higher scores = greater likelihood of reliance on strategies)

METHODS (CON'T)

DATA ANALYSIS:

- **Spearman's Bivariate Correlations** were used to examine degree of food insecurity since COVID-19 (USDA module range 2.86-8.48; higher scores indicative of more severe food insecurity) and food access challenges, as well as food insecurity and barriers to food assistance programs.
- **One-way ANOVA** was used to explore differences in likelihood of reliance on compensatory strategies to afford food with respect to food insecurity classification (coded as food secure, newly food insecure since COVID, and consistently food insecure before and since COVID).

RESULTS

Figure 1. Distribution of Food Security Classification: Newly / Consistently Food Insecure or Food Secure ($n = 510$)

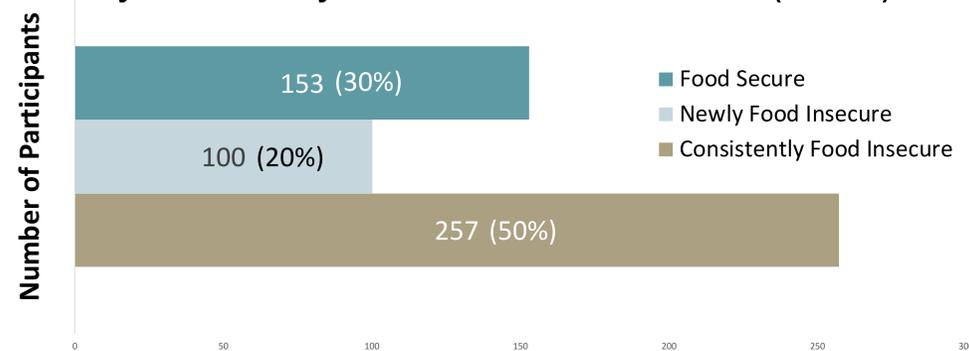
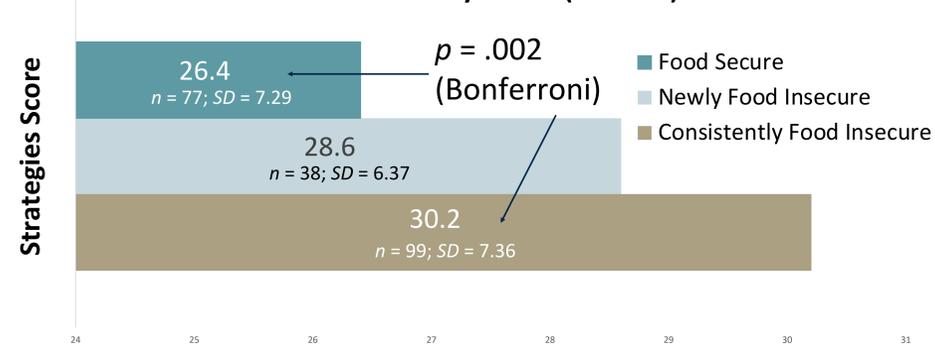


Figure 2. Summed Mean Food Access Compensatory Strategies Score and Food Security Status ($n = 214^a$)



a. Respondents with incomplete responses for this set were dropped from the analysis

Table 1. Correlations Between Degree of Food Insecurity & Barriers to Food Programs / Food Access Challenges

Barrier to Food Program ^a	r value	p value
I am worried about the paperwork I need to provide for program enrollment ($n = 410$)	.13	.014*
It is difficult for me to travel to the food program offices to apply & recertify ($n = 410$)	.24	<.001***

Food Access Challenge ^b	r value	p value
Had challenges knowing where to find help for getting food ($n = 359$)	.332	<.001***
Had to go to more places than usual to find the food my household wanted ($n = 388$)	.236	<.001***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

a. 5 correlations analyzed; statistically significant results displayed in table

b. 6 correlations analyzed; all statistically significant; highest correlation coefficients displayed in table

CONCLUSIONS

Twenty percent of SNAP-eligible Utahns from the sample were classified as newly food insecure after the onset of COVID-19, and 50% were consistently food insecure. Barriers to food program use and general food access challenges brought on by the pandemic were associated with food insecurity, which may have elicited increased anticipated reliance upon food affordability strategies among food insecure respondents. Future research should explore mitigation of food insecurity among this vulnerable population considering the anticipated lasting impacts of COVID-19.

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