

2018

Food Insecurity: United States

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Handzel, Courtney. "Food Insecurity: United States" (2018). *Global Issues in Public Health*.
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Background

Food insecurity is a public health issue that affects many people around the world, even in the United States. It is an environmental issue that is defined as “having inconsistent access to adequate food because of limited financial and other resources...” (Pruitt et al., 2016, paragraph 1). In the United States, there are several populations that tend to be more susceptible to food insecurity. These populations include, but are not limited to, low-income families, disabled people, and minority races. In 2016, it was estimated that 42 million Americans were food insecure, 13 million of them being children (Hunger & Health, 2018).



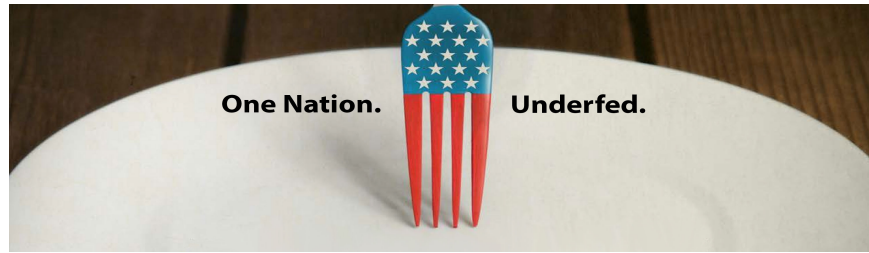
<http://www.hungerreport.org/costofhunger/css/photos/table2.png>

Influences

The main causes of food insecurity among these populations are economic and social, including “...low educational attainment, low household income, lack of health insurance...” (Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010, paragraph 17). The level of education a person has affects what type of career they may have. If they have a low paying job they may not be able to afford a substantial amount of food to feed themselves or their family. They would also not be able to afford living in a high-income neighborhood. The low-income neighborhoods are often associated with food deserts because of their limited access to quality food. “Often the only stores in low-income neighborhoods are convenience stores, which carry low-nutrition, high-cost foods...” (Gucciardi, Vahabi, Norris, Del Monte, & Farnum, 2014, paragraph 10).

Food Insecurity and Diabetes

Food insecurity is a public health issue that has the potential to affect anyone so it is crucial that preventative measures are in place. Such measures include the National School Lunch Program, SNAP, and WIC along with many others. These programs help provide Americans with quality food in their homes and in their schools (Murthy, 2016). By providing food for many people, these programs help fight the serious outcomes that come with food insecurity. One common outcome is diabetes. There are two main ways that food insecurity raises the risk of diabetes. First, the cost of health care for a chronic disease can force adults to go into food insecurity. Second, the health education patients with diabetes receives increases awareness of the ability to afford healthy food, causing them to not eat enough due to their inability to pay for it (Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010). In fact, the risk for diabetes is about 50% higher among adults in food-insecure households as opposed to those in food-secure households (Gucciardi, Vahabi, Norris, Del Monte, & Farnum, 2014). These risk factors show off in Seligman, Laraia, and Kushel’s research. They found that “there was clinical evidence of diabetes among 7.4% of adults living in food-secure households and 10.2% of adults living in food-secure households...” (Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010, paragraph 19). Although these programs benefit many, there is still a lot of work to be done.



<https://craigmcnamara.org/images/FoodInsecurity2.jpg>

Interventions

With food insecurity being such a common and under acknowledged issue, it is possible to think that there might never be a solution. However, there are possible solutions, they just could take some time to implement, but the potential benefits would make all of the work worth it. One solution would be to require certain healthy foods to be kept in stock at places like gas stations and quick marts so people who buy their groceries at these stores have access sustainable foods. By implementing this policy, people would have the opportunity to access these healthier foods even if they do not live near a larger food store. Also, it would be ideal if these healthier foods were sold at a reasonable cost so someone with a lower income could still benefit from access to healthy foods. When more people have better access to healthier foods, health problems caused by food insecurity would decrease drastically, and that is one benefit that is worth the work.

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