

Depression a key link between intimate partner violence and food insecurity

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Women who experience physical, mental or sexual abuse at the hands of their partners have an increased likelihood of being food insecure. That's according to a new study out of the University of Houston Texas Obesity Research Center (TORC), which may prove valuable to those creating interventions for those populations.

"The bridge between the two issues is depression," said assistant professor and TORC researcher Daphne Hernandez. "Our study found that [women](#) experiencing [intimate partner violence](#) are more likely to be depressed, which impacts their ability to ensure a [food](#)-secure household."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Core Food Security Module, "food insecurity" reflects rationing, portion control and inability to offer families balanced meals.

Hernandez followed data from nearly 1,700 women involved in a romantic relationship (married or cohabitating with a partner) who also had experienced intimate partner violence (physical, mental and/or sexual).

She found that mothers who experienced intimate partner violence were at 44 percent greater odds of experiencing depression. Additionally, households in which mothers experienced depression were twice as likely to experience food insecurity.

"It appears that [depression](#) may impact mothers' motivation to obtain and prepare food due to their decreased appetite, mental and physical fatigue and feelings of being overwhelmed," she said. "Additionally the moms' feelings of helplessness, brought on by the violence they experienced, may challenged them to access the proper support."

Hernandez studies the impact of family dynamics on nutrition, health and obesity. She says few studies have examined how maternal health challenges impact a household's [food security](#). The goal of this study was to increase the understanding of how the family environment and women's health impact the lives of families with young children. She says this information may prove valuable for those organizations charged with supporting families in times of crisis.

"What this means is that targeting issues central to women's health must become a priority in combating [food insecurity](#)," Hernandez said.

"Providing mental health screenings at the time individuals apply for food assistance may help identify women who need interventions to keep them safe, mental healthy and food secure."

More information: The study is now accessible online in the *Journal of Women's Health*.

Provided by University of Houston

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