

Study: High rates of food insecurity found in southern Appalachia colleges

May 28 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

College students in southern Appalachia are affected by food insecurity at a higher rate than the national average, which can translate into poor academic performance and unhealthy spending habits and coping

mechanisms, according to a new study coauthored by researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and published in *Current Developments in Nutrition*.

Researchers found that food insecurity has an average prevalence of 30.5 percent among college students who responded to online surveys at 10 four-year universities in the Southern Appalachia region, which includes Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, and West Virginia. In comparison, the national average of college students that face food insecurity is approximately 12 percent. At some campuses surveyed, food insecurity levels were as high as 51.8 percent.

Over 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students participated in the survey. Researchers performed a statistical analysis of the responses using the US Department of Agriculture's Adult Food Security Survey and other scales to assess money expenditure, [coping strategies](#), and academic progress.

"We found that students who are food insecure had lower academic grades than those who did not face food insecurity," says Marsha Spence, UT professor of public health nutrition and coauthor of the study. "These same students usually try to save money on other things to obtain food, such as spending less in transportation, utilities, and sometimes even medication."

According to the study, several factors can predict food insecurity status: being a junior or a sophomore, having an ethnic minority background, receiving financial aid, and having reported [poor health](#) indicated a higher risk of food insecurity.

"This study is part of a growing body of evidence that suggests that a large percentage of [college students](#), including students from four-year public institutions, are at risk of food insecurity," said coauthor

Elizabeth Anderson Steeves, professor in UT's Department of Nutrition. "Studies like ours are important to understand [food insecurity](#) and its negative effects on students, so that universities can implement policies and programs to help alleviate this problem and help students succeed."

More information: Rebecca L Hagedorn et al, Expenditure, Coping, and Academic Behaviors among Food-Insecure College Students at 10 Higher Education Institutes in the Appalachian and Southeastern Regions, *Current Developments in Nutrition* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/cdn/nzz058](#)

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

Citation: Study: High rates of food insecurity found in southern Appalachia colleges (2019, May 28) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-high-food-insecurity-southern-appalachia.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.