

Teens may go hungry as poorest families struggle to feed kids

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(HealthDay)—In extremely poor American families, teens go hungry more often than younger children, a new study finds.

Parents will first forgo food themselves to feed their kids. But if there still isn't enough food for everyone, younger children take priority over [teens](#), the research showed.

"If you're really poor, you try to sacrifice yourself first, but when you're forced to make some choices, these parents are deciding to let the teens not have enough," said lead author Robert Moffitt.

The Johns Hopkins researchers analyzed data from about 1,500 families in Boston, Chicago and San Antonio, who were surveyed several times between 1999 and 2005.

The average income in these families was about \$1,558 a month. Most families were headed by single parents who were unemployed and receiving government assistance. Most were minorities.

Teens in those families went hungry twice as often as their [younger siblings](#), according to the study.

"If if they have to give up on something, they're giving up on teenagers," Moffitt said in a Hopkins news release.

"It's hard to imagine parents having to do that," he added. Moffitt is a professor of economics at Johns Hopkins' Krieger School of Arts and Sciences.

The researchers said about 6 percent of kids who were 11 years old or younger weren't getting enough to eat, and 12 percent of those aged 12 to 18 regularly went hungry. Of those older children, 14 percent of boys didn't get enough food, compared to 10 percent of girls.

Different levels of hunger weren't as evident in families who routinely sat down for meals together, the study found. If [food](#) scarcity was caused by short-term financial strain, such as job loss or illness, all [children](#) were fed equally as soon as the [parents](#) were able to find money or return to work.

"The numbers were really surprising and discouraging. So many low-income families were experiencing this—and that was before the Great Recession [2008]. Now numbers are likely even worse," Moffitt said.

The findings were published recently as a working paper for the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research.

More information: The World Hunger Education Service has more about [hunger in America](#).

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