

The Scholar-Practitioner

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A publication of R is for Thursday

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Invited summaries of research for scholar and practitioner advocates for, traditionally hidden college student populations

Current Hidden College Student Populations

May include those who have foster care or justice-involved experiences, who are survivors of sexual violence, who are recovering drug or alcohol addicts, who face housing insecurity, or who are considered Third Culture Kids

R is for Thursday

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National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations

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The Scholar-Practitioner is a monthly publication of invited research summaries that target the research-to-practice gap for U.S. scholar and practitioner advocates for college students with experiences in foster care and other hidden college student populations.

This publication reinforces the work of the **National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations (NCHP)** by providing a space to share research applications for practice. NCHP was the first research conference dedicated to this multidisciplinary area of study. The NCHP 3rd conference will be held at Oklahoma State University, September 14-16, 2022.

NCHP 2022 registration is open now! Click [here](#) to register.

A Developing Crisis in Hunger: Food Insecurity within 3 Public Colleges before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ahmed, T., Ilieva, R. T., Shane, J., Reader, S., Aleong, C., Wong, H. Y., Chu, C., Brusche, D., Jiang, K., Lopez, D., & Yan, A. (2022). A developing crisis in hunger: Food insecurity within 3 public colleges before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2022.2026853>

Research Summary

This study examined how the COVID-19 pandemic affected college students' experience of food insecurity – defined as the lack of physical or economic access to enough nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable food for an active, healthy life. College students, who are more likely to be food insecure than the general population, may be especially vulnerable to experiencing both food insecurity and related academic, psychological, and health-related struggles. Many college campuses have responded to their students' food insecurity issues by creating food support programs such as campus food pantries. However, students might have found it harder to use such resources when their campuses closed during the pandemic. This study reviewed students' food insecurity, use of campus, and other food support resources, and the impact of food insecurity on their academic performance, physical/psychological health, access to healthcare, and housing security before and during the first year of the pandemic.

Research Questions:

- What are students' food security statuses and use of food programs in total and pre- and during-pandemic times?
- What are the differences between students' pre- and during-pandemic responses regarding several indicators of need (e.g., food insecurity, academic performance, housing insecurity, physical/psychological health, and access to healthcare)?
- What are the relations between students' food insecurity and related indicators of need in total as well as before and during the pandemic?

Methodology:

1989 ethnically and socioeconomically diverse undergraduates (71.6% female, 27.5% male, 10% other; average age of 23.75 [SD = 7.69]) were recruited from three diverse New York City (NYC) public colleges (including two community colleges) for a study that ran from September 2019 to December 2020. Participants filled out an online questionnaire regarding their experiences with food insecurity within and outside of their college. This questionnaire included 81 survey items and two writing prompts regarding their food experiences.

Participants placed in the “before pandemic” group if they completed the survey before March 3, 2020 and in the “during pandemic” group if they completed the survey on or after March 3, 2020. March 3, 2020 was used because it was the date in which NYC acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic as a public health crisis and closed all NYC public colleges.

Findings:

1. In total, 42.94% of participants reported high food security, 25.29% marginal food security, 21.37% low food security, and 10.41% very low food security. Rates of food insecurity (i.e., students being in the low or very low food security groups) did not increase after the start of the pandemic.
2. When compared to pre-pandemic students, during-pandemic students were

more likely to report: (1) accessing food more often through their campus food pantry, non-campus food pantries, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program; (2) receiving more financial aid from the government; and (3) feeling less limited in their use of the campus food pantry.

3. During-pandemic students were also more likely to report: (1) having their academic performance negatively impacted by food insecurity, (2) experiencing greater housing insecurity, and (3) having worse access to healthcare.
4. At all time periods, students' food insecurity was related to their performance on academic tasks such as studying for exams and attending classes, as well as their reporting greater housing insecurity, worse psychological well-being, worse health, and less access to healthcare.

Implications:

Food insecurity affects college students' wellbeing regardless of the pandemic. Yet the pandemic exacerbated certain problems regarding students' well-being while paradoxically empowering them to learn more about and get food-related support through various assistance programs. Compared to the pre-pandemic group, the during-pandemic group reported

several protective factors – such as receiving more government aid and more frequently using food support programs. Moreover, during-pandemic students reported a decrease in factors (such as feelings of embarrassment) that might prevent them from using the campus food pantry.

College students benefit from public policies, such as greater access to the SNAP and WIC programs, that support their food security. Students may be primed to take advantage of such public policies and related food support programs because of heightened awareness of and communication about food insecurity concerns during the pandemic. These programs might have decreased college students' stigma regarding and increased their use of food relief efforts during a difficult time. College students' access and willingness to use these public programs may support their pursuit of higher education during the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, an effective way in which to help college students stay enrolled in higher education may be to offer food support via well-advertised public programs.

Note: This work was supported by the CUNY Research Scholars Program and the Professional Staff Congress - City University of New York (PSC-CUNY) Research Award Program administered by the Research Foundation of The City University of New York.

SAVE *the* DATE
Sept. 14-16, 2022



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