Despite an abundant food supply in the United States, people in some households lack access to enough food to meet their basic needs (referred to as food insecurity). In 2000, the Food Research and Action Center estimated that 31 million people in the United States experience food insecurity. Many of these persons also experience hunger on a regular basis. Food insecurity can lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies and malnutrition. Food insecurity impacts people of all ages and is of particular concern for pregnant women, children, elderly persons and other nutritionally vulnerable groups. Hunger decreases a worker’s productive energy, reduces a child’s ability to learn, and weakens a person’s resistance to disease.

The 1999–2000 Los Angeles County Health Survey included a set of six questions to assess food security among 1,898 households with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL). The questions have been shown to be a valid measure of food security and have been used in state and national surveys. Based on responses to the questions, households in the survey were classified as either food secure or food insecure. Food insecure households were further classified as those with hunger and those without hunger.

Twenty-five percent of Los Angeles County’s households below 300% FPL reported food insecurity, including 10% that reported hunger. 35% of households below 100% FPL reported food insecurity (Table 1).

- 35% of households below 100% FPL reported food insecurity (Table 1).
- 26% of households between 100 and <200% FPL reported food insecurity.
- 16% of households between 200 and <300% FPL reported food insecurity.

4. Poverty status is based on the 1999 Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In 1999, 100% FPL for a family of two adults and two dependants was $16,895 per year, 200% FPL was $33,790 per year, and 300% FPL was $50,685 per year.
Among households below 100% of the FPL, those with children were nearly twice as likely to report food insecurity (42%) as those without children (23%) (Table 1).

Food insecurity was reported by 32% of African Americans, 29% of Latinos, and 21% of whites.  

Among Latino respondents, those who were not U.S. citizens were more likely to report food insecurity (34%) than those who were U.S. citizens (23%).

Public Assistance

Among food insecure households living below 100% of the FPL, 68% reported that they did not receive public assistance including Food Stamps, WIC vouchers, General Relief, or any other federal, state, or county payment.

Among those participating in the State of California’s Welfare-to-Work program (CalWORKs), nearly one-third (32%) reported food insecurity.

Homelessness

Respondents were asked if they had ever been homeless in the past five years.

Among the 8% who reported past homelessness, 57% reported food insecurity compared to 23% of those who had not been homeless during this period.

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For more information or to obtain additional copies of this factsheet, call 213-240-7785 or visit our web site at www.lapublichealth.org.

Additional References:


6. Asians and American Indians were not included because of insufficient numbers in the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>With Children Percent ±95% C.I.</th>
<th>Without Children Percent ±95% C.I.</th>
<th>All Households Percent ±95% C.I.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 100% FPL*</td>
<td>42.4% ±5.3</td>
<td>23.0% ±6.6</td>
<td>35.1% ±4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% to &lt; 200% FPL</td>
<td>25.3% ±4.5</td>
<td>27.1% ±4.4</td>
<td>26.3% ±3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200% to &lt; 300% FPL</td>
<td>16.5% ±4.9</td>
<td>16.2% ±3.6</td>
<td>16.2% ±2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Federal Poverty Level